

PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELING FOR BEREAVED PARENTS:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE ROLE  
OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY IN COPING WITH THE LOSS OF A CHILD

A Dissertation  
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the Faculty of  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

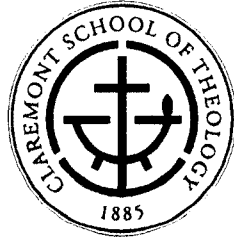
by  
Deuk Hyoung Yoon

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This dissertation completed by

**DEUK HYOUNG YOON**

has been presented to and accepted by the  
faculty of Claremont School of Theology in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

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**Faculty Committee**

K. Samuel Lee, Chairperson

Duane R. Bidwell

Andrew Dreitcer

**Dean of the Faculty**

Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook

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## ABSTRACT

### Pastoral Care and Counseling for Bereaved Parents: A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Christian Spirituality in Coping with the Loss of a Child

Deuk Hyoung Yoon

As a practical theological work, this phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of bereaved parents as a way to examine the role of Christian spirituality in coping with the loss of a child. The death of a child is a tragic and incomprehensible experience. Bereaved parents search for the meaning of the loss and of their lives by asking God “Why?” Recently, researchers in the areas of psychology and mental healthcare have been interested in studying the role of spirituality/religiosity in parental grief. However, practical theologians have shown less concern about the issue. This dissertation explores from an interdisciplinary approach the reality and meaning of the spiritual journeys and lives of bereaved parents.

In order to understand and interpret bereaved parents’ experiences, this study used the qualitative method, particularly IPA (Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis). Three Korean bereaved couples and three individual bereaved parents five to fifteen years after the loss of a child were recruited through email and phone calls to pastors of churches. In-depth interviews were conducted with semi-structured questions, and data were analyzed through within-case analysis and across-cases analysis based on the principles of IPA. From this analytic process, seven super-ordinate themes emerged: *Faith Community as a Sources of Support, A Moment of Encountering God, God Gives their Life Meaning, Significant Perspective Changes on Life and Death, Sharing their Stories of Life, Family as the Ground of Sustaining Life, and Remembering the Child.*



These findings were put into dialogue with both social sciences and theology. From the first dialogue between meaning-making theory and a narrative theological perspective, the spiritual journey of bereaved parents to find meaning of the loss and their lives was explained. Then, I discussed these findings in a second dialogue between ritual and feminist theories. In the interpretation of the findings, spiritual healing and transformation of bereaved parents were emphasized. In the normative task, I attempted to integrate all discussion into a pastoral care and counseling framework. I extracted one essential factor and six variable factors of Christian spirituality that affected bereaved parents as they were coping with their grief. I defined the spiritual journeys and lives of bereaved parents as God-centered healing and transformation. In the end, I presented four suggestions that provide pastors with insightful information that can enlighten and guide pastoral ministry of bereaved parents.

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study. They were willing to share their personal and painful stories with me and us. Without their participation in the research, I could not even have started my research project. I believe that their participation in this study will contribute to developing pastoral resources for the church and to helping other bereaved parents going through similar situations.

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## DEDICATION

For the participants of this study  
who were willing to share their grief stories

In memory of their children

Danny

Kay

Chan-Min

David

Sam

Lisa

Tae-Min

Remembered with love

And for all bereaved parents in the world

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the lived experience of bereaved Korean parents five to fifteen years after the death of their child and to interpret the meaning of their experiences. The focus of the study is to explore how Christian spirituality has affected the parents as they have dealt with the loss and to examine various ways parents have coped with the loss of a child in order to find implications for the pastoral care and counseling of bereaved parents.

#### Discussion of the Problem

The loss of a child is one of the most devastating, incomprehensible, and overwhelming experiences that parents can face. The death of a child causes complicated grief reactions, and the parents experience the grieving process longer than with other bereavement experiences.<sup>1</sup> A study reveals significantly higher grief intensity in those surviving the death of a child as compared with adults who experience death of a parent or spouse; this is regardless of the age of the child at the time of death, the causes of death, and the years since death.<sup>2</sup>

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, 2,513,171 people died in the United States in 2011.<sup>3</sup> Among them were 33,528 children who died between the ages of 0 and 14. Many of these deaths occurred within the first year after birth as the

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<sup>1</sup> J. William Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, 4th ed. (New York: Springer Publishing, 2009), 222.

<sup>2</sup> Joan Arnold and Penelope Buschman Gemma, "The Continuing Process of Parental Grief," *Death Studies* 32 (2008): 659.

<sup>3</sup> Donna L. Hoyert and Jiaquan Xu, "Deaths: Preliminary Data for 2011," *National Vital Statistics Reports*, Vol. 61, no. 6. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, 2012.

result of congenital malformations, short gestation periods, low birth-weight, and SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). However, the deaths of 1-to-14-year-old children were mainly caused by unintentional injuries, including motor vehicle crashes, falls, fires, drowning, and poisonings. The report also indicates that homicide, suicide, and malignant neoplasm are the next most common causes of death of older children. Likewise, in the United States, about 90 children every day die as the result of accidents and diseases, which means that every day 90 sets of parents grieve for the death of a child.

The death of a child reverses the natural order, as it is assumed that children will outlive their parents. Children are regarded as extensions of their parents in many ways, and they represent the beginning of the next generation and the future of the parents. When a child dies, parents' fundamental assumptions about safety and justice and the meaning of life and hope are shattered, and they are left with a frightening sense of meaninglessness and personal vulnerability. The loss of a child can shake parents' understanding about the world and purpose of life, and affects parents' mental, social and spiritual lives.<sup>4</sup>

It is not unusual for the bereaved parents to experience an overwhelming sense of helplessness because they think that as parents they should have been able to prevent the death and they feel both helplessness and guilt because they could do nothing.<sup>5</sup> A sense of helplessness causes other emotional responses such as anger, guilt, and fear. The anger can be directed toward the health system, the person who caused the death, relatives, a spouse, and God. Moreover, the loss of a child also heavily impacts family stability and

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<sup>4</sup> Wendy G. Lichtenthal et al., "Sense and Significance: A Mixed Methods Examination of Meaning Making After the Loss of One's Child," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 66, no. 7 (2010): 793.

<sup>5</sup> Worden, 226.

intrudes upon family equilibrium. The bereaved parents may blame each other for not having the same responses, or they may blame family members who place stress on them.<sup>6</sup>

According to studies of gender and grief, there are some differences between a bereaved mother and father in grief reactions. Mothers reach out to help others more frequently, tend to cope by writing and reading about loss and grief, and cry much more than fathers.<sup>7</sup> Within family relationships, parents unconsciously put surviving siblings in a difficult position by focusing more on them to alleviate feelings of guilt and trying to substitute surviving siblings for the lost child.<sup>8</sup> Some parents give a child born later the same name or one that is similar to the dead child's. It is not unusual for siblings to be neglected immediately following the death because the parents are in a state of trauma and are unable to provide for them.

Recently, many researchers have conducted qualitative and quantitative studies in relation to the application of religion/spirituality in response to bereavement. In a review of quantitative studies about religion and spirituality in adjustment following bereavement, Jennifer Wortmann and Crystal Park identified 73 published studies and categorized subjects of religion/spirituality into 10 dimensions: affiliation, attendance, beliefs, general religiousness, intrinsic/extrinsic religiousness, religious coping, activities, religious social support, spirituality, and belief in helpfulness of religion.<sup>9</sup> From the

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<sup>6</sup> Worden, 225.

<sup>7</sup> Alexis Versalle and Eugene E. McDowell, "The Attitudes of Men and Women Concerning Gender Differences in Grief," *Omega* 50, no. 1 (2004-2005): 54.

<sup>8</sup> Worden, 222.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer H. Wortmann and Crystal L. Park, "Religion and Spirituality in Adjustment Following Bereavement: An Integrative Review," *Death Studies*, 32 (2008): 707-21.

results of their study, Wortmann and Park concluded that each measurement of religiosity and spirituality had influenced bereaved individuals positively in their adjustment.<sup>10</sup>

Other researchers found similar outcomes from their studies, showing results that religious and spiritual beliefs and practices have positive effects on individuals who are coping with loss. Spiritual and religious beliefs and practices are recognized not only as coping mechanisms that help bereaved individuals adjust to the stressful life event, but also as great resources that enable bereaved couples to strengthen their marital relationship.<sup>11</sup> Froma Walsh mentions that religious beliefs and practices offer “comfort, hope, support, and connection” to bereaved family members by addressing the meaning of life and death and providing guidance and resources.<sup>12</sup>

In particular, Mark Butler et al. conducted a research study involving 560 religious couples to identify the role of prayer in marital conflict resolution. Their findings indicate that prayer is “a significant potential resource for softening, reconciliation, and conflict resolution among religious couples.”<sup>13</sup> The results of this study also show that prayer enhances the experience of emotional validation and mindfulness, reduces emotional reactivity and negativity, and increases self-change and

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<sup>10</sup> Wortmann and Park, 723.

<sup>11</sup> Ileana Ungureanu and Jonathan G. Sandberg, “‘Broken Together’: Spirituality and Religion as Coping Strategies for Couples Dealing with the Death of a Child; A Literature Review with Clinical Implications,” *Contemporary Family Therapy* 32 (2010): 307-10.

<sup>12</sup> Froma Walsh, “Spiritual Resources in Family Adaptation to Death and Loss,” in *Spiritual Resources in Family Therapy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Froma Walsh (New York: Guilford Press, 2009), 81.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Butler, Julie A. Stout and Brandt C. Gardner, “Prayer as a Conflict Resolution Ritual: Clinical Implications of Religious Couples’ Report of Relationship Softening, Healing Perspective, and Change Responsibility,” *American Journal of Family Therapy* 30 (2002): 33.

responsibility for problem solving, particularly in a traumatic situation such as loss of a child.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, Benore and Park have researched how death-specific beliefs play a role in appraising the meaning of the death. They found that beliefs in an afterlife and a sustained relationship with the deceased are important coping mechanisms that decrease distress, facilitate the recovery process, and allow adaptation to the new life of living without the deceased. Particularly, in parental bereavement studies, Mary Sormanti and Judith August found that large numbers of bereaved parents experience ongoing spiritual connections with their deceased children including dreams, visions, and physical sensations.<sup>15</sup> Judging by those research outcomes, it seems apparent that religious and spiritual beliefs, activities, and motivations play important roles in coping with loss of a child.

Given these results from quantitative and qualitative studies in the areas of psychology, mental healthcare, and family counseling, it is surprising that in the field of practical theology few published studies have been done that examine the role of Christian spirituality for bereaved parents. The lack of academic study would suggest that there are also limited resources for pastors who take care of bereaved parents in the ministerial context. In a study for pastoral ministry to bereaved parents, David Asch indicates the important role of the pastor and the inability of the pastor to provide

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<sup>14</sup> Butler et al., 30.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Sormanti and Judith August, "Parental Bereavement: Spiritual Connections with Deceased Children," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 67, no. 3 (1997): 460–69.

adequate help to bereaved parents.<sup>16</sup> Asch explains that this void occurs because of a lack of personal experience, training, and resources in the pastoral context.

Personally, I encountered such a situation of bereavement when I was in charge of a local church in a rural part of Korea about 13 years ago. At the time, I focused my ministry on teenagers and college students, managing an after-school program for poor children who lived around the church. One of the youth members, Hyunwoo<sup>17</sup> was a faithful member of my church. His parents were divorced, and he lived with his mother and older brother. His mother managed a small restaurant near a college as a means of livelihood. She was not a church member, but I had a good relationship with her. She always appreciated me for taking care of Hyunwoo who liked to talk to me about his school life, music, and friends. I often visited his home to talk and provide him with counseling.

One day in 1999, I heard from another youth member that Hyunwoo's brother was killed in a car accident. It was tragic. Hyunwoo's 16-year-old brother who was without a driver's license, drove a car carrying four friends. The car crashed into a big tree, causing four immediate deaths; one survived with serious injuries. As soon as I heard, I ran over to see Hyunwoo. However, his mother did not allow me to see him. His mother treated me coldly. After some days, I received a call from Hyunwoo, and he said that he could not come to my church anymore because his mother thought that her first son's death was related to Hyunwoo's going to church. I was not invited to his funeral service. The city in which I ministered was a traditional city, and people in the city still

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<sup>16</sup> David Asch, "Pastoral Ministry to Bereaved Parents" (DMin diss., Biola University, 2001), 10-12.

<sup>17</sup> Hyunwoo is a disguised name, and all names will be identified by pseudonyms to protect their identities in my dissertation.

entertained superstitious beliefs. I attempted several times to meet him and his mother to comfort them. However, I realized that my attempts were useless. After a year, when I resigned the church, I left without saying good-bye to them.

Shortly before I came to the United States for study in 2006, I wanted to visit Hyunwoo and his mother, and decided to drive to their city to see them. The city is four driving-hours from Seoul where I lived. It had been seven years since Hyunwoo's brother died. When I came into her restaurant, she did not recognize me at first until I addressed her as Hyunwoo's mom. She was surprised to see me. At the time, I was unsure how she responds to my visit. However, unbelievably, she was glad to see me, providing me with a cup of tea. She started talking about her life after her son's death, saying, "I was insane at the time. I am so sorry. I should not have done that to you. My son Hyunwoo wanted to see you so many times, but I did not allow him." She repeated that she had a hard time coping with the death of her son and how much Hyunwoo missed me, and she said, "Five years after my son's death, I had barely come back to normal life. I am sorry. Please forgive me being rude to you at the time."

I said to her, "I have never thought that you were rude to me. Reversely, I was sorry that I had no deep sense about a death of a child to understand your grief and help you." I thanked God for the moment of reconciliation. I was unable to meet Hyunwoo because he was in military service at the time. Our conversation continued for an hour as she talked about her life and Hyunwoo. At the moment I was about to leave the restaurant with thankful heart, she said, "Pastor! I will pray for you to be a great pastor. I believe that you will be." I was surprised by her saying so because usually a non-Christian Korean does not use the word pray. So I asked her if she had become a Christian, and she



said yes. Then I realized that Christian faith had influenced her ability to cope with her grief and had changed her attitude toward me.

Thinking of Hyunwoo's family, I have thought about the way in which the pastor counsels and supports bereaved parents. In particular, there have been many numerous tragic deaths caused by building collapse, fire, and crashes in Korea. On June, 30, 1999, 19 Kindergarten children who were sleeping in a group room of Sealand Youth Retreat Center died in burning flames, which also caused the death of four teachers and injured six persons. In February 2014, 10 freshmen college students who were attending new student orientation held at a resort gymnasium died when the roof collapsed.

On April, 16, 2014, a ferry carrying 476 passengers from Incheon toward Jeju Island sank. Among them, 325 were high school students who planned to visit the Island as a field trip. Only 172 passengers were rescued, and 294 people, the majority of them students, were reported dead and 10 people were missing when the ferry sank. For days after the accident happened, the parents hoped their child would be found alive, but divers found only dead bodies inside the sunken ferry. The parents blamed the captain of the ferry who escaped from the sinking ferry while the students waited for the announcement from the captain about how to respond to the emergency. Parents also blamed the government for sending a rescue team too late. Not only the parents but all the people in Korea felt extreme rage and grief.

In Korea, there is a saying that parents are buried in the ground when they die, but a child is buried in the parents' hearts. This shows the depth of parental grief which is long-lasting. What should the pastor say to bereaved parents in the face of the death of a child? If it is a case of suicide, homicide, or sudden tragic accident, how would the pastor

deal with the bereaved parents' grief, their complicated feelings and reactions? How would the pastor speak about God in this devastating situation? What are specific Christian beliefs and practices helpful in coping with the loss of a child? What is the role of the Christian community in helping the bereaved parents? Those are the questions that I have raised for the pastor who must deal with the issues to console the bereaved parents appropriately, based on the faith of the community.

In particular, Korean churches have not provided an appropriate form of memorial service for those who have suffered the death of a child. I think that is because of the influence of Confucian teachings. In Korean Confucianism, if parents pass away, children perform a memorial service on a regular basis called ancestral rites. However, if a child dies, parents do not regularly perform a memorial service because the child is not an ancestor, but an undutiful son or daughter from the perspective of Confucianism. Therefore, there have been many people who have not had a ritual for their deceased children, and it causes the bereaved parents to experience double grief.

Thus, the purpose of the current study is to discover implications for pastoral care and counseling for bereaved parents by exploring their lived experiences and the role of Christian spirituality in dealing with an unjust loss. I believe that the task of practical theology is to enable faithful practices by evaluating shared practices and interpreting experiences in light of Scripture and tradition. In order to interpret a grief experience that takes place in a specific situation, this practical theological study will be open to diverse aspects of theological interpretation incorporating social science studies and theological reflection.

### Thesis

My thesis is that Christian spirituality helps the grieving process of bereaved parents as they search for the meaning of their lives along their path to healing, growth, and hope by providing pastoral support that comes specifically from Christian faith, values, community, rituals, and a relationship with God. I believe that the implications for the pastoral care and counseling for the bereaved parents can be drawn from exploring the bereaved parents' experiences.

### Method and Theological Framework

For this practical theological study, I employed a qualitative approach because this study deals with the complex nature of the human response to bereavement in an effort to understand the experiences of bereaved parents. Qualitative methods study subjects in their natural settings and seek to understand and interpret those experiences and phenomena.<sup>18</sup> Many practical theologians have attempted to provide a practical theological research framework. In particular, Richard Osmer tries to build a practical theological foundation that would allow congregational leaders to engage in a practical theological interpretation of events, situations, and contexts that they confront in their ministry. For the framework of this study, I followed Osmer's four tasks of practical theology: the descriptive-empirical, the interpretive, the normative, and the pragmatic tasks.

For the descriptive-empirical task, I used the method of phenomenological research, particularly IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis). The purpose of phenomenological research is to describe the essence of an activity or the lived

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<sup>18</sup> John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 29.

experience of a group of people in order to identify a phenomenon.<sup>19</sup> According to John Creswell, researchers investigate a phenomenon common to human experience, using collected data to discover common themes, “a composite description of the essence of the experience.”<sup>20</sup> However, IPA research is concerned with understanding experiences in a particular phenomenon rather than finding the essence of experiences. As Smith et al. indicate, “IPA has the more modest ambition of attempting to capture particular experiences as experienced for particular people.”<sup>21</sup> In order to give voice to bereaved parents, my primary research tool was an in-depth interview with open-ended questions to draw out the meaning of their lived experiences and to discover the role played by Christian spirituality in the grieving process. The interview with participants was audio-recorded and then transcribed. The detailed descriptions of participants’ experience were then analyzed through initial analysis, within-case analysis and cross-cases analysis, and findings were categorized by seven super-ordinate themes.

The interpretive task of this qualitative study is intended to put all findings into conversation with insights from social sciences and theologies. This process was based on a correlational method. As John Swinton and Harriet Mowat point out, practical theology is fundamentally “hermeneutical, correlational, critical and theological.”<sup>22</sup> An interdisciplinary perspective is needed to interpret human experience in a particular situation in order to lead to deeper insights into human pain and suffering. In particular,

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<sup>19</sup> Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 52.

<sup>20</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Los Angeles, SAGE Publications, 2013), 76.

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan A. Smith, Paul Flowers, and Michael Larkin, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2009), 15.

<sup>22</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 76.

Swinton and Mowat emphasize a *mutual/critical correlational* method for a practical theological task. This model is a revised correlational model based on Paul Tillich's correlational method that correlates existential questions from the cultural context of human experiences with answers derived from the Christian message.<sup>23</sup> The *mutual/critical correlational model* was developed by Tracy and Browning as a model to show how Christian theology can provide an answer to the questions about life, death, and grief that are raised by the social sciences. Their model allows a dialogue on critical human issues to take place between theology and the social sciences. According to Tracy and Browning, their critical correlation method enables critical and constructive dialogue between Christian tradition and contemporary sources of knowledge to interpret theory and practice that take place in a particular socio-cultural situation.<sup>24</sup>

The purpose of this task was to interpret the role of Christian spirituality in dealing with the loss of a child and to suggest implications for pastoral care and counseling. This task has to do with sharp discernment to answer the question "What ought to be going on?" In the interpretive task, I interpreted developed themes through dialogues between social sciences and theology: dialogue between meaning-making theory and a narrative theological perspective, dialogue between ritual theory and feminist theology. It is important to note that I conducted the interpretation task with an *interdisciplinary* approach. According to Johannes A. Van der Ven, there are four practical theological approaches for interpretation of context. I introduce three of them to validate the use of interdisciplinary interpretation.

First, *Monodisciplinarity* is a dialogue with the praxis of the church to correspond

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<sup>23</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 77.

<sup>24</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 78-80.

with theological disciplines, which takes the form of applied theology. Van der Ven rejected this approach because it deflects practical theology from its purpose.<sup>25</sup> Second, *Multidisciplinarity* is found among theologians who use important concepts, ideas, and data of social sciences to provide practical theology with theological reflection. It allows social scientists to make contributions to practical theology. However, Van der Ven indicates that “social-scientific inquiry precedes the theological one and is therefore subordinate to it.”<sup>26</sup> In addition, theological reflection on the social-scientific analysis becomes dangerous in that it lacks systematic structure.<sup>27</sup> Third, *Interdisciplinarity* enables practical theology to have a reciprocal interaction with social sciences such non-theological disciplines as psychology, sociology, ritual studies, and anthropology.<sup>28</sup> In interdisciplinary dialogue, theology and the social sciences have equal status and a cooperative relationship.

In interpretive task, I deal with various theodicies used to explain the death of a child described by the interview participants. As the Cook and Wimberley study of theodicies indicates, the participants’ various theodicies involved blaming God or themselves, seeking for a special purpose in the death of their child, and seeing the death as a punishment for their sin. How do the parents perceive God’s image as love when their child is suffering? How can the love of God allow children to die? Where is the will

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<sup>25</sup> R. Ruud Ganzevoort, “Van der Ven’s Empirical / Practical Theology and the Theological Encyclopaedia,” in *Hermeneutics and Empirical Research in Practical Theology: The Contribution of Empirical Theology by J. A. van der Ven*. Eds. Hermans, Chris A.M. and Mary E. Moore (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 63.

<sup>26</sup> J. A. van der Ven, *Practical Theology: An Empirical Approach* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 94.

<sup>27</sup> van der Ven, 96.

<sup>28</sup> van der Ven, 97.

of God? These issues were brought up by the participants, and I reflected on these themes from biblical and theological perspectives.

The insights gained from the dialogue conducted between the social sciences and theologies have important implications for pastoral care and counseling for bereaved parents. These implications involve the normative task and the pragmatic task of practical theology when offering suggestions for Korean churches and pastors. According to Osmer, the pragmatic task is to answer the question: “How might we respond?” This task determines strategic plans of action for congregational leaders who want to guide congregations in meeting the challenge of making changes within the social culture and the congregational identity.<sup>29</sup> However, I think that detailed strategies need to be developed by pastors to design specific plans of care and counseling for the bereaved parents in accordance with the church’s particular circumstance. I believe that the implications and suggestions I provided will be meaningful resources that will enable them to utilize various elements of Christian spirituality in taking care of bereaved parents among their members.

### Definitions of Key Terms

#### Christian Spirituality

For this study, defining the term “Christian spirituality” is the first task. For the definition, firstly, I discuss the relationship between religion and spirituality. In a pluralistic world, the distinction between religion and spirituality reflects the tendency of modern people who choose not to profess themselves as belonging to a particular religion. People often use the phrase, “I am spiritual, but not religious.” In this sense, spirituality

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<sup>29</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 176.

can refer to the individual aspect of a transcendental relationship. Dennis Klass indicates that spirituality focuses on the present moment of personal life whereas religion is rooted in the historical social structure and organized practice of beliefs.<sup>30</sup> As a structured form of a belief system, religion includes “shared, institutionalized, moral values, practices, involvement in a faith community, and, for most, beliefs in God or a Higher Power.”<sup>31</sup> Religion also involves particular forms including rituals, sacred scripture, doctrine, and rules of conduct.

On the other hand, spirituality is more personal, informal, and broader. Walter Principe defines spirituality as “aspects of a person’s living a faith or commitment that concern his or her striving to attain the highest ideal or goal.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, spirituality is lived reality, a way of life, and ways of understanding the world within his or her religion, philosophy or ethic. In addition, spirituality is concerned with the fundamental human capacity to seek meaning, values, and purpose of life and to attain the self-transcendence necessary to recognize and nurture intimate relationships with others, the world, and the transcendental being.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the characteristics of spirituality can be listed as those involving human relationships with others and ultimate being, with life’s purpose and meaning, with personal beliefs and practices, and with a worldview.

Moreover, I find Lawrence LaPierre’s interpretation of spirituality helpful as a

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<sup>30</sup> Dennis Klass, *The Spiritual Lives of Bereaved Parents* (Philadelphia: Bruner/Mazel, 1999), 16.

<sup>31</sup> Froma Walsh, “Religion, Spirituality, and the Family: Multifaith Perspectives,” in *Spiritual Resources in Family Therapy*, ed. Froma Walsh (New York: Guilford Press, 2009), 5.

<sup>32</sup> Walter Principe, “Toward Defining Spirituality,” in *Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 51.

<sup>33</sup> David B. Perrin, *Studying Christian Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 18-19.



way to explore its multilayered experience. In order to identify contemporary authors' use of spirituality, LaPierre, hospital chaplain and spiritual director, reviewed literature written mostly from the perspectives of the Judeo-Christian community and the health-care field. As a result of his study, LaPierre suggested six major factors of spirituality: The first is the search for purpose and meaning in life.<sup>34</sup> The second is the belief that there is a being beyond the limit of ordinary human experience. Third is community as experiencing spirituality together. Fourth is religion as a group experience of sharing the same beliefs, rituals, rules, and patterns of life. Fifth is the natural world where people experience spiritual reality. Sixth is transformation as "a dynamic process that leads to change as one becomes increasingly involved with others."<sup>35</sup> LaPierre concludes that religion and its practices and beliefs can be included in spirituality as a larger whole.

Religion and spirituality cannot be completely separated from each other because personal spiritual moments and lives are maintained over time by symbols and rituals that have a religious character. Spirituality can be experienced both in religion and outside of religion, and it can also involve religious beliefs and practices that have a broader meaning. David Perrin indicates that authentic spirituality is not necessarily allied to belief in a God or a specific religion, but it does not exclude a particular religious belief system.<sup>36</sup> Thus, we can point to Buddhist spirituality, Confucian spirituality, Islamic spirituality, and Christian spirituality in accordance with each religious perspective. The current study will explore bereaved parents' lives to identify the role of Christian spirituality in dealing with loss of a child and, thus, I will use a definition of spirituality

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<sup>34</sup> Lawrence L. LaPierre, "A Model for Describing Spirituality," in *Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 76.

<sup>35</sup> LaPierre, 80.

<sup>36</sup> Perrin, 18.

that has a Christian focus.

In the field of the study of spirituality, Christian spirituality often is defined through its historical development of traditions. While this is an important aspect of spiritual experience, such spiritual traditions will not be part of my consideration. The current study focuses on how Christian bereaved parents have experienced spiritual moments as part of their grief process as they cope with the loss of their children. In this study, I use the term Christian spirituality as a broader concept of Christian religious beliefs and practices including all elements of spirituality as discussed above. In addition, my definition of Christian spirituality will fit into this practical theological research of the lived experience of bereaved parents. I define Christian Spirituality as a dynamic process that involves efforts to search for the meaning of life and the sacred moments that can be experienced through Christian rituals and activities within both personal and community life, a process that enhances one's compassion for the self and others and that includes a relationship with the Trinity of God.

#### Grief, Grieving, and Mourning

Grief is among the deepest of human emotions, and it is generally understood as a response to a significant loss. In this study, the word grief will be used primarily to refer to one's emotional response to the death of a person, while the word mourning will be used to refer to an external expression of one's internal grief.<sup>37</sup> In other words, persons grieve internally and mourn externally. On the other hand, grieving and mourning can sometimes be used interchangeably when they refer to the coping mechanism of attempting to heal and resolve the loss.

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<sup>37</sup> Peter Mwit, *Understanding Grief as a Process: An Innovative Journey towards Healing, Growth, and Reconciliation* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1999), 3.

### Grief Responses

Because each person experiences loss differently, responses to grief also vary, and the duration of the response is unique to every individual. Mitchell and Anderson describe grief as “a particular response to a particular loss of a particular relationship at a particular time.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, over-generalizing about grief would constrain the bereavement experience and the bereaved individuals in their full expression of grief. However, bereavement brings about a number of common responses in terms of emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and physical changes.

Emotional responses include emptiness, loneliness, isolation, fear, guilt, shame, anger, sadness and despair.<sup>39</sup> Cognitive responses are related to many different thoughts that flood the minds of the bereaved. Disbelief is often the first thought to come up after hearing about a death, particularly if the death was sudden. Bereaved persons also experience confusion, which makes it difficult for them to concentrate, and they forget things as the result of preoccupation, obsessive thoughts, and rumination. Physical responses refer to a variety of common physical symptoms such as headaches, insomnia, loss of appetite, weight loss, fatigue, dizziness, and indigestion. Behavioral responses of searching, crying, sighing, and visiting places associated with the deceased are normal grief reactions.

### Complicated Grief Responses

While some bereaved persons experience emotional, physical, cognitive, or behavioral reactions in the normal process of grief, which is a kind of an adaptation to the

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<sup>38</sup> Kenneth Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 82.

<sup>39</sup> Mitchell and Anderson, 61.

loss, other bereaved individuals experience high levels of distress, which is often referred to as a complicated grief response to the death of a significant other. The criteria to distinguish complicated grief from normal grief depend on its duration, intensity, and symptomatic behaviors that impair one's social, occupational, and other areas of functioning.<sup>40</sup> The key symptoms of complicated grief include "preoccupation with thoughts of the loved one, intense separation distress, prolonged disbelief, and recurrent intrusive images or dreams."<sup>41</sup>

Complicated grief is not a single syndrome, but is related to a combination of personal, cultural, and social factors. Common factors that affect the grief process include the relationship with the deceased, natural and unnatural traumatic elements of the death, and personal history of losses. In addition, social factors play an important role in the development of complicated grief responses. People tend to be silent when it is a socially "unspeakable death" such as suicide, and the mourner's grief is not recognized when it is a "socially negated loss" such as in abortion.<sup>42</sup> These are what Kenneth Doka calls disenfranchised grief, which is "not openly acknowledged, socially validated, or publicly observed."<sup>43</sup>

### Audience

The primary audience of this study is to be Korean and Korean American pastors. I deal with the experience of Korean bereaved parents and the role of Christian

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<sup>40</sup> Junietta Baker. McCall, *Bereavement Counseling: Pastoral Care for Complicated Grieving* (New York: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2004), 70.

<sup>41</sup> Linda P. Riley et al, "Parental Grief Responses and Personal Growth Following the Death of a Child," *Death Studies* 31 (2007): 278.

<sup>42</sup> Worden, 132-33.

<sup>43</sup> Kenneth J. Doka, *Disenfranchised Grief: New Directions, Challenges, and Strategies for Practice* (Champaign, IL: Research Press, 2002), 5.

spirituality within Korean communities and families in order to provide resources for pastoral care and counseling. I am aware that participants' experiences and perspectives in coping with the loss of a child can be different from other non-Korean bereaved parents because of the cultural differences. The second important audiences are Korean and Korean American theologians and students in the field of pastoral theology and practical theology who seek to counsel and care for those suffering bereavement and with particular concern for bereaved parents.

In addition, secular counselors will be interested in this study not only because it deals with the nature of grief care and counseling, but also it is a qualitative study with in-depth interviews, exploring the role of Christian spirituality in various experiences of the bereaved parents. In particular, psychologists and mental health care providers have become concerned enough with spiritual issues to add spirituality as a resource or strategy of their work. On the other hand, although the participants of this study are all Korean American bereaved parents, I expect that this study will be helpful to other non-Korean Christian communities, pastors, pastoral theologians and theological students.

#### Scope and Limitation

This study was conducted in order to understand the lived experience of bereaved Korean parents five to fifteen years after the death of their child. This understanding will be used to discover implications for pastoral care and counseling by exploring the role of Christian spirituality in parents' ways of coping with the loss. This study did not limit the cause of death, but included deaths of children from natural (illness) and unnatural (accident, suicide, and homicide) causes. However, I limited participants to parents who lost a child between ages 1 and 20 in order to focus on the loss of young and teenage

children. For this study, I excluded the parental experiences of the deaths of adult children and infants, including miscarriage, stillbirth, and SIDS. Nevertheless, I recognize that parental grief is intense and complicated regardless of the age of the child.

In addition, this study limits itself to bereaved parents five to fifteen years after the loss of their child. Murphy studied bereaved parents who had lost their child to violent deaths such as accident, suicide, and homicide. Murphy found that most parents' progress in adjusting to the loss of child is made during the third and fourth years, although symptoms of mental distress decrease by the end of the first year of bereavement.<sup>44</sup> Murphy also indicates that the adjustment process is very complex because it is necessary to measure every aspect of the parents' perception. It is an ongoing process with long-term consequences. Likewise, I am aware that this study cannot capture the full range of all families' unique experiences and circumstances.

For this research interview, participants are all Korean bereaved parents who are living in the United States and are Christians who have attended their churches even after the loss of a child. As I am a Korean pastor and a chaplain, I have seen many deaths, conducted funeral rituals, and have understood the uniqueness of the Korean culture as it relates to death. At the time this is written, I have lived in the United States for nine years with my wife and two daughters (eight and eleven years old), I also understand the dynamics and the relationships between Korean parents and their children as an immigrant family.

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<sup>44</sup> Shirley A. Murphy, "The Use of Research Findings in Bereavement Programs: A Case Study," *Death Studies* 24 (2000): 594-95.

### Originality and Contributions

Recently, secular counselors have become concerned with spirituality as one of the resources or strategies for the grieving process. Researchers in the field of psychology and mental health care have inquired into the role of spirituality, primarily conducting quantitative studies. In a recent review of the studies about the role of spirituality and religiosity in adjusting to bereavement, Wortmann and Park indicate interpretation issues in the studies as one of the limitations in psychological study, and they stress that researchers need to measure in depth the multidimensional nature of religion and spirituality such as the content of beliefs including one's understanding of suffering, forgiveness, God, and the afterlife.<sup>45</sup>

Although psychological studies and the outcomes of their research are meaningful in stimulating the thinking of pastoral theologians and providing resources for care and counseling, the proper interpretation of theological themes is the responsibility of theologians, particularly pastoral theologians who deal with human suffering and pathos. As Bonnie Miller-McLemore asserts, "close study of human nature is certainly an appropriate characterization of pastoral theology's prime subject matter," including how humans deal with suffering, lament, grief, anger, tragic accident, violence, and their care.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Miller-McLemore asserts that pastoral theologians need to draw a picture of these subjects of study from a distinctive angle asking "How God, faith, doctrine, and scripture make a difference in understanding and responding to compelling

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<sup>45</sup> Wortmann and Park, 725-26.

<sup>46</sup> Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Also a Pastoral Theologian: In Pursuit of Dynamic Theology (Or: Meditations from a Recalcitrant Heart)" *Pastoral Psychology* 59 (2010): 823.

human experience.”<sup>47</sup> She indicates that what is missing in psychological study is human experience.

In this study, I will describe the lived experience of Korean bereaved parents with in-depth interviews in which parents who have experienced this devastating human tragedy will be asked questions that draw on the wealth of knowledge about death found in Christian tradition. In particular, this study will address the fact that Korean pastors and communities lack adequate resources for the care and counseling for bereaved parents. Identifying essential themes from an examination of the role of Christian spirituality as bereaved parents have experienced it at the time of the event and afterward will provide an informed foundation for pastoral care and counseling in order for pastors to support not only bereaved parents but also bereaved individuals in general.

### Outline of the Chapters

In Chapter 1, I provide a description of the research project as a whole, including the purpose of the study, discussion of the core problem, thesis, methodology, and flow of the argument. As an introduction to the dissertation, I present an overview of parental grief and the necessity of studying the lived experience of bereaved parents and the role of Christian spirituality in coping with the loss of a child within Christian communities and families. In addition, I define key terms used in the dissertation such as Christian spirituality, grief, grief responses, and complicated grief. This chapter also includes the scope, limitations and contributions of the study.

The intention of Chapter 2 is to offer an overview of the literature that deals with spirituality in parental bereavement. The literature review has three main divisions: grief

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<sup>47</sup> Miller-McLemore, “Also a Pastoral Theologian,” 825.



theories, grief from pastoral theological perspectives, and parental grief and spirituality. First, I will briefly introduce theoretical models of bereavement that have been developed to facilitate bereaved individuals; these models will range from early psychoanalytic theory to current theory including stage theory, attachment theory, task theory, the meaning-making model, and the dual-process model. Second, I will review literature that deals with grief in general within the area of pastoral care and counseling in order to explore how theologians deal with the role of Christian spirituality in grief situations. Third, I will move to literature that focuses on the experience of bereaved parents. Because there is not much literature dealing with parental grief in pastoral theology, I will also review literature written from psychological perspectives.

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to present the research method used to describe the lived experience of bereaved parents. For this study, I identify the methodology of the qualitative and phenomenological study as the most appropriate frame of the study. The process of phenomenology will be provided including main methods, data collection, and data analysis. In addition, I will explain the role of the researcher and the process of recruiting interview participants. Ethical considerations are discussed for the research process with the awareness that this phenomenological approach deals with a sensitive subject for the bereaved parents.

In Chapter 4, I analyze interview data; they are transcribed, coded, and verified in order to identify core themes of the experience of bereaved parent participants. These core themes will explicate the meaning of the experience and the role of Christian spirituality. From within-case analysis and cross-cases analysis, seven super-ordinate themes were classified: *Faith Community as a Source of Support, A Moment of*

*Encountering God, God Gives their Life Meaning, Significant Perspective Changes on Life and Death, Sharing their Stories of Life, Family as the Ground of Sustaining Life, and Remembering the Child.* Before I present themes, I provide information about each participant and the situation that existed when their child died.

In Chapter 5, I attempt to identify found themes in a dialogue between social sciences and theology. First, I discuss findings in dialogue between meaning making theory and narrative perspectives. I link narrative therapy to a narrative theological perspective. Second, ritual theories are presented based on a theory of spirituality to explain bereaved parents' experiences leading to dialogue with feminist liturgy and Korean feminist theology. Various factors and functions of Christian spirituality for bereaved parents will be extracted from these dialogues between social sciences and theology.

In Chapter 6, the significance of Christian spirituality will be discussed. The purpose of this research is not to provide concrete strategies of counseling for bereaved parents, but to offer implications for the role of Christian spirituality for pastoral care and counseling for bereaved parents and other bereaved individuals. From the discussion of the role of Christian spirituality in coping with the loss of a child, I believe that pastors and lay leaders can apply many of its insights to their particular ministerial contexts, such as taking care of bereaved parents and individuals in general.

In Chapter 7, I summarize chapters and findings with conclusive thoughts. Limitations and contributions of this study will be addressed with suggestions for future studies.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In the field of pastoral theology, particularly in grief study, many pastoral theologians tend to use psychological theories as the basis of their perspectives of bereavement counseling. Many theories provide pastoral theologians with useful insights about the ways of coping with the loss of a loved one. In this selected literature review, first, I examine grief theories that have been developed from psychoanalytic perspectives as well as contemporary theories. Second, I explore how pastoral theologians deal with grief and parental grief, focusing on what psychological theories are involved in and what spiritual resources are described in their studies. Unfortunately, few works of literature dealing with parental grief are found in the area of pastoral theology. Thus, I will deal with books and articles written from both psychological and pastoral theological perspectives on parental grief focusing on how the authors describe the role of religion and spirituality in coping with grief.

#### Grief Theories

##### Early Grief Theories

The field of psychoanalysis has greatly influenced how people understand grief. Freud was the first to publish a grief theory.<sup>48</sup> He recognized grief as a normal experience, but one that leads to serious psychological problems if the bereaved fails to emotionally detach from the deceased. Differentiating normal mourning from melancholia, he indicated that one may experience melancholia when one's negative feelings toward the deceased are internalized and become part of one's own sense of

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<sup>48</sup> Melissa M. Kelly, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry* (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press, 2010), 34.

self.<sup>49</sup> Freud proposed that the ego needs to disengage and eventually withdraw energy from what has been lost in order to search for new attachments.<sup>50</sup> For Freud, healthy recovery from grief requires breaking an emotional bond with the deceased and returning to pre-loss status or functioning.<sup>51</sup> Although Freud did not provide a systematic framework for the grief process and disregarded individual experiences, he offered an understanding of the multiple levels of human attachment and how attachment to that which has been lost operates on grief responses.

Lindemann studied acute grief reactions experienced by individuals who lost loved ones by natural causes, disaster, and war. He was a psychiatrist at a Boston hospital when a devastating fire broke out in Boston causing 492 deaths and many injuries.<sup>52</sup> After the disaster, he helped survivors and family members work through their grief. Based on his work, Lindemann differentiated normal from abnormal reactions to loss. He described common features of normal physical and psychological responses to loss: somatic disturbances, preoccupation with the image of the deceased, guilt, hostility, loss of warmth in relationships, and disorganized behavior.<sup>53</sup> Abnormal grief reactions included a delayed response and a distorted response. The work of Lindemann gave rise to clinical guidelines for the identification of abnormal grief reactions. Like Freud, Lindemann proposes that the successful outcome of grief is “emancipation from emotional bondage to the deceased.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Kelly, 35.

<sup>50</sup> Geraldine Humphrey and David Zimpfer, *Counseling for Grief and Bereavement* (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), 3.

<sup>51</sup> Kelly, 38.

<sup>52</sup> Kelly, 44.

<sup>53</sup> Kelly, 45.

<sup>54</sup> Erich Lindemann, “Symptomatology and Management of Grief,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 101 (1944): 143.

Kubler-Ross's five-stage theory is frequently mentioned when death and grief are the topic under consideration. Through her landmark contribution, *On Death and Dying*, Kubler-Ross brought the issues related to death and dying into public awareness. She theorized the five stages of dying process from interviews with terminally ill patients in response to her communications with them over a period of two and half years. She identified the stages as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Although her focus was not on those going through grief, her theory and approach are widely recognized today.<sup>55</sup> However, Kubler-Ross herself said that there are many more grief emotions than those five and that not everyone experiences them all or in any particular order.

#### Attachment Theory

John Bowlby was the first to formulate an attachment theory after studying the strong affectional bonds human beings develop with others. His work provided a way of understanding human distress when the bonds to particular others are broken.<sup>56</sup> Bowlby's attachment theory resulted from his observational studies of young children separated from their mothers and placed in an institution for a time.<sup>57</sup> From these observations, he categorized specific behaviors into three phases: protest, despair, and detachment.<sup>58</sup> In the first phase, the children he studied showed initial distress caused by the separation from their mothers. Then, as they lost hope for the return of their mothers, they became quiet. Finally, they adapted themselves to the new circumstance and opened themselves

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<sup>55</sup> Humphrey and Zimpfer, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Worden, 13.

<sup>57</sup> Kelly, 44.

<sup>58</sup> Kelly, 55.

to caregivers and peers.<sup>59</sup>

Bowlby concluded that attachments are built early in life, and the developed attachments affect one's later life.<sup>60</sup> He indicated that attachments come from "a need for security and safety."<sup>61</sup> Loss of an attachment results in feelings of insecurity with emotional distress such as anxiety, anger, and depression. In the situation of loss and grief, attachment behaviors are apparent in bereaved persons in the way they attempt to fill their painful emptiness and make new attachments.<sup>62</sup> It is a normal behavior to form attachments with significant others as well as search for new attachments when the original ones are lost.<sup>63</sup> However, bereaved persons tend to yearn for the deceased person's return and to blame the deceased for leaving unless initial bonding with parents was achieved properly.<sup>64</sup> Bowlby's attachment theory explains how attachments that one had to the deceased influence the intensity and duration of the grief process. In addition, Bowlby proposed four phases of mourning: numbing, yearning and searching, disorganization and despair, and reorganization.

### Task Theory

Worden provided a practical application of an established theory by emphasizing the role of counselors and by focusing counseling on the tasks of grief.<sup>65</sup> Worden presented a unique conceptualization of the mourning process and outlined four distinct

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<sup>59</sup> Kenneth Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 28.

<sup>60</sup> Humphrey and Zimpfer, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Worden, 14.

<sup>62</sup> Humphrey and Zimpfer, 6.

<sup>63</sup> Worden, 14.

<sup>64</sup> Mitchell and Anderson, 28.

<sup>65</sup> Humphrey and Zimpfer, 6.

tasks for mourning based on Lindemann's approach and Bowlby's attachment theory.<sup>66</sup> Worden explained that the word *task* seemed to better represent the work of the grief process than the words, *stages* and *phases*.<sup>67</sup> He indicated that "phases imply a certain passivity, something that the mourner must pass through."<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, the concept of tasks emphasizes the mourner's action. Worden saw grief as a cognitive process of "confrontation with and restructuring of thoughts about the deceased" and saw counseling as a facilitative process to help the bereaved perceive four tasks of grief: to accept the reality of the loss, to process the pain of grief, to adjust to a world without the deceased, and to find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life.<sup>69</sup>

The first task is accepting the reality of the loss, a cognitive process that allows the mourner to accept the reality that the person is dead and will not return. The opposite of accepting the reality is "*not believing* through some type of denial," and it could impede movement through the mourning process.<sup>70</sup> The second task includes facing not only pain of grief but also anxiety, anger, guilt, and other feelings associated with the loss.<sup>71</sup> The bereaved persons need to fully experience this pain during grief work. The third task, adjusting to the environment, involves three types of adjustment to the loss:<sup>72</sup> external adjustment helps one realize the roles that the deceased played in one's life and to develop strategies to fill those roles. Internal adjustment refers to the ways that the bereaved needs to redefine life after the loss. Spiritual adjustment refers to one's sense of

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<sup>66</sup> Humphrey and Zimpfer, 6.

<sup>67</sup> Worden, 38.

<sup>68</sup> Worden, 38.

<sup>69</sup> Worden, 39.

<sup>70</sup> Worden, 40.

<sup>71</sup> Worden, 44.

<sup>72</sup> Worden, 46-49.

the world because death challenges one's belief system, and the bereaved searches for meaning of the loss and explores existential issues more deeply. The fourth task helps to determine an appropriate place for the dead in the bereaved's emotional life in order to keep on living in the world.<sup>73</sup>

### Contemporary Theories

Early grief theories have suggested two main hypotheses. One is that the bereaved will arrive at a form of resolution and get back to normal. The other is that the bereaved will need to sever attachments with the deceased. However, current research indicates that bereaved adults may experience personal growth and transformation after loss and grief, which means that they do not return to the previous state. Hogan and Schmidt developed the Grief to Personal Growth Theory that is an approach to "understanding how people grow as a result of loss."<sup>74</sup> From research, Hogan found that bereaved adolescents gained more understanding, tolerance, compassion, and caring for themselves and others after coping with a sibling's death.<sup>75</sup> In addition, contemporary theories propose that connections with the deceased can be continued in new ways and that grief can promote personal growth. The Continuing Bonds Theory indicates that the bereaved can maintain ongoing relationships with the deceased, and it can be an integral part of successful adaptation to bereavement.<sup>76</sup>

On the other hand, Stroebe and Schut introduced the Dual Process Model to

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<sup>73</sup> Worden, 51.

<sup>74</sup> Patricia Moyle Wright and Nancy S. Hogan, "Grief Theories and Models," *Journal of Hospice and Palliative Nursing* 10, no. 6 (2008): 354.

<sup>75</sup> Wright and Hogan, 354.

<sup>76</sup> Negel P. Field, "Unresolved Grief and Continuing Bonds: An Attachment Perspective," *Death Studies* 30 (2006): 739.



address the limitations of earlier models, including a theory of stages, phases, or tasks.<sup>77</sup>

Stroebe and Schut identify two dimensions of bereavement stress: loss-oriented stressors and restoration-oriented stressors, and they argued that the bereaved could not attend to both dimensions at the same time.<sup>78</sup> They believed that grief was “an oscillatory process” in which a bereaved individual selected experiences alternatively to avoid being overwhelmed by suffering during the grief process.<sup>79</sup> Although Stroebe and Schut maintain this model was created to provide for a better understanding of the grief process, Worden argued that there was no difference between this model and the task model of mourning.<sup>80</sup>

On the other hand, Neimeyer proposed the need to make meaning after loss. To make meaning refers to the need to make sense of things, to understand the world, and to articulate the goal of life.<sup>81</sup> However, loss tends to challenge the belief systems about oneself, others, and the world. To make sense of loss, the bereaved individuals need to reconstruct the meaning of their lives by “having more plots for one’s narrative” and “bringing new or altered interpretations to the loss.”<sup>82</sup> In addition, the work of reconstructing meaning after loss cannot be detached from “one’s social and interpersonal world” because meanings are often built in relationship with others.<sup>83</sup> The process of meaning reconstruction after loss is painful. However, it could be an opportunity to “deconstruct a destructive life story.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Wright and Hogan, 353.

<sup>78</sup> Worden, 53.

<sup>79</sup> Wright and Hogan, 353.

<sup>80</sup> Worden, 53.

<sup>81</sup> Kelly, 77.

<sup>82</sup> Kelly, 84.

<sup>83</sup> Kelly, 85.

<sup>84</sup> Kelly, 85.

### Grief from Pastoral Theological Perspectives

As for pastoral care for the bereaved, the book *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastoral Care* has influenced the study of grief that provides pastors with insight into the experience of loss. Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson acknowledge the complexity of many experiences of loss, suggesting six major types of loss: material, relationship, intrapsychic, functional, role, and systemic. They indicate that human beings can experience any type of loss at any point of their life cycles, and one type can influence other types. In addition, they note that the grief process is unique to each person because each individual responds to loss in particular ways, saying that “no two occasions of grief are ever exactly the same.”<sup>85</sup>

As influenced by their grief model of attachment theory, successful grieving means being able to create a new attachment to another person or develop a strong relationship with God. Nonetheless, Mitchell and Anderson stress the importance of remembering in the sense of emancipation from emotional involvement with the past. For them, holding on to significant associations with the deceased is necessary early in grief. To learn not to feel painful moments again in remembering the deceased, Mitchell and Anderson emphasize the need of gratitude that makes it possible to shift remembering to hoping, to reintegrate with God by discovering new meaning in life, to restore the depleted self, and return to involvement with a significant community.

Mitchell and Anderson note that the funeral is part of the grieving process of remembering and hoping. They believe that through funerals, the bereaved persons, friends, and community members begins the process of re-integration by reaffirming the death, expressing emotions, valuing the deceased’s life, and regaining hope and comfort.

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<sup>85</sup> Mitchell and Anderson, 53.

The authors also indicate that funeral rituals are enhanced by being personalized, and the rituals must be based on the faith of the Christian tradition, maintaining faithful witness to the Gospel and speaking of the hope of resurrection. They see that Christians' grieving needs to be grounded on Christian faith in "God's presence, embodied in Christ and continued in the church," which provide the bereaved with secure comfort.<sup>86</sup> In addition, Mitchell and Anderson emphasize the role of the Christian community as the primary context for the bereaved being heard.

The book *Good Grief: A Constructive Approach to the Problem of Loss* by Granger Westberg<sup>87</sup> gives in-depth knowledge about the grief process since it was published in 1962, and recently the fourth edition of the book was published in 2011 as the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition. For Westberg, the primary matter in the grieving process is "how to grieve." As the title of the book *Good Grief* implies, he explores the good aspects of grief when he describes how people experience grief and what people can learn from it. Inspired by the work of Erich Lindemann, Westberg suggests ten stages of grief as the road most people must walk to get back to normal daily life. In each stage, he provides readers with guidance and insight with an emphasis on the importance of expression of the feelings and particularity of each experience.

For Westberg, the final goal of the grief process is to adjust to a new reality. However, unlike early psychoanalytic approaches, Westberg does not mean that the bereaved returns back to the same status before having experienced the loss. Westberg believes that people change after going through a painful event such as death, and people can be weakened or strengthened depending on how they react to the event. In coping

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<sup>86</sup> Mitchell and Anderson, 102.

<sup>87</sup> Granger Westberg, *Good Grief: A Constructive Approach to the Problem of Loss* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. 1962).

with grief, Westberg emphasizes mature faith in God that leads the bereaved to successfully adjust to a new situation in contrast to the response of those who have an immature faith.<sup>88</sup>

I think there is no question that having confidence that God is struggling with us in the midst of a distressing life moment is a healthy way of working through grief, and that it can even deepen the faith of the bereaved as a growth experience. However, his comment on mature faith focuses only on the conviction of the strong relationship with God. No one can measure one's level of maturity of faith with or without appropriate criteria. Although Westberg provides Christian readers with useful guidance, he does not deal with various spiritual or religious elements that can be comparably important in coping with grief.

While Westberg missed other spiritual elements that can help bereaved individuals to get through suffering within Christian spirituality, Allen Hugh Cole offers various practical strategies for those who experience loss of loved ones in his writing, *Good Mourning: Getting Through Your Grief*. In particular, he includes Christian practice and faith in the list of coping strategies indicating the important role of ritual, minister, and God's presence as he believes that "faith can play a central role in helping us through loss."<sup>89</sup> Cole understands Christian faith primarily in "the story of God's transforming and redemptive work in human lives," which connects "our own suffering" to "God's suffering" in "Jesus' suffering."<sup>90</sup> This faith leads to God's promise to be with those who are mourning and suffering.

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<sup>88</sup> Westberg, 57.

<sup>89</sup> Allan Hugh Cole, Jr., *Good Mourning: Getting Through Your Grief* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 41.

<sup>90</sup> Cole, 71.

Cole further develops his argument for the importance of the Christian faith, suggesting practical ways of cultivating trust in God. Cole believes that Christian practices can deepen the connection to God in the faith community. Five faith practices are described as ways of promoting good mourning including church membership, worship, Scripture reading, serving others, and prayer. In particular, Cole suggests practices for making worship, reading Scripture and prayer a central part of the bereaved life.

I believe that his integrative ways of coping with grief are useful for both bereaved individuals and caregivers. In a larger sense, he explains grief based on the attachment theory. However, he seems to maintain a balance between psychological insights and theological perspectives by not explicitly drawing upon stage models and other psychological theories.

R. Scott Sullender explores what factors enable grief to be a growth experience, concerning the interrelationship of grief and growth in *Grief and Growth: Pastoral Resources for Emotional and Spiritual Growth*. In particular, he selects four traditional religious factors that affect how we deal with grief. These include community, rituals, beliefs, and faith. Sullender is aware that rituals and beliefs have become less important, losing their power of comforting the bereaved in these days, and psychology attempts to fill the pastoral role. In facing these challenges, he believes that pastors can be strengthened for pastoral care of the bereaved by deliberately looking at traditional Christian resources.<sup>91</sup>

From the perspective of humanistic psychology, Sullender introduces the way

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<sup>91</sup> R. Scott Sullender, *Grief and Growth: Pastoral Resources for Emotional and Spiritual Growth* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 5.

people grow using “growing motivation” and “deficient motivation” to explain how grief experience can be transformed into personal growth.<sup>92</sup> In addition, Sullender describes St. Paul’s understanding of spiritual growth as sanctification to grow into the “likeness of Christ,” which is a multi-dimensional growth within one’s beliefs, attitudes, values, and faith. He believes that loss can be an impetus for spiritual growth to strengthen faith, reassess the value of life, and reconnect to God.

For me, it is impressive that Sullender explains how four factors facilitate the bereaved in integrating psychological knowledge with biblical interpretation and theological concepts. He describes the importance of beliefs and meaning-making after loss using Albert Ellis’ Rational Emotive Therapy, Viktor Frankl’s Logotherapy, and other psychological perspectives. Sullender asserts that it is important to search for meaning and the purpose of life in the middle of pain and sorrow believing that “ultimately life is meaningful.”<sup>93</sup> He relates those perspectives on human suffering to faith in a God who cares and who is the ground of being and source of life, to use Paul Tillich’s theological insight. I am sure the ways he approaches grief and spiritual growth from multi-dimensional disciplines will be helpful in further grief study.

In a similar way, in her book, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry*, Melissa Kelley attempts to look at recent major grief theories from theological and ministerial perspectives as a way to provide pastors with helpful resources for pastoral ministry of grief care. Among contemporary grief theories, Kelley emphasizes human attachment to God as the ultimate secure foundation in one’s experience of grief and states that the role of the minister is to encourage the bereaved to maintain an

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<sup>92</sup> Sullender, 70-80.

<sup>93</sup> Sullender, 190.

attachment to God within the faith community. In addition, Kelley introduces meaning-making theory as the essential feature of contemporary grief theories that draws upon narrative therapy. The work of Robert Neimeyer. Kelley believes that making meaning helps the bereaved to make sense of an experience of a loss, to revise the distorted stories of life, and to understand the purpose of life.

In particular, Kelley introduces the metaphor of mosaic as a way to explain the complexity and particularity of the grief experience, stating, “No two experiences of grief are the same” in recognition of personal and cultural differences for the grieving process.<sup>94</sup> In one interesting aspect of her work Kelley deals with a religious method of coping with the death of a child. Kelley suggests that God and the religious community can be great resources for those who face traumatic situations. Kelley asserts that bereaved persons can cope well with loss of a loved one when they believe that God is with them in the midst of the crisis, that there is meaning in suffering, and that they are spiritually connected to people.<sup>95</sup>

This is a perspective that is similar to Sullender’s who emphasizes that when meaning-making includes trust in God, it helps the bereaved move through their grief. Just as Sullender suggests community, rituals, beliefs, and faith as important factors in coping with grief, Kelley acknowledges that the primary dimensions of religious coping involve religious beliefs, religious practice, and religious community. However, in her word Kelley does not include practical religious guidance or strategies to cope with grief. In addition, I agree with Sullender who argues that Kelley missed the importance of rituals as a prime resource for religious coping.

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<sup>94</sup> Kelly, 5.

<sup>95</sup> Kelly, 112.

In addition, Sullender sharply criticizes the work of Kelley in that she seems to be delighted as though she had found new perspectives from secular psychologies. However, some pastoral theologians have already applied them to pastoral care. Moreover, Sullender points out that attachment to God can be helpful, but pastoral efforts to comfort mourners by connecting to God in a time of loss may result in “denial or avoidance of the raw human emotions of grief.”<sup>96</sup> In general, I agree with Sullender’s critiques on the work of Kelley. However, Kelley’s work is valuable in that she has attempted to link major grief theories into ministerial groundwork as an opening conversation between two areas of grief care, although she seems to lack an adequate grounding in theological and biblical insights to sufficiently rationalize it.

While Kelley’s writing is inclined to be more theoretical, Wayne Oates offers a practical guide on grief and separation. *Grief, Transition, and Loss: A Pastor’s Practical Guide* is written to provide pastors with resources to give care and counseling to the bereaved from the time of a death through the following year. This book is an updated version of his previous *Pastoral Care and Counseling in Grief and Separation* published in 1976, which draws heavily on the psychoanalytic approach and the five-stage theory of Psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross.

In *Grief, Transition, and Loss*, firstly, Oates in comforting the bereaved describes the role of the pastor as being like Jesus, “a person of sorrows, acquainted with grief.”<sup>97</sup> He emphasizes the role of the funeral in a crisis situation. For Oates, the funeral is an opportunity to celebrate the life of the deceased and a time to show our trust in God. He

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<sup>96</sup> Scott Sullender, “Grief’s Multi-dimensional Nature: A Review of Melissa M. Kelley’s *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry*,” *Pastoral Psychology* 63 (2014): 114.

<sup>97</sup> Wayne Oates, *Grief, Transition, and Loss: A Pastor’s Practical Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 19-20.



recommends that pastors include the family in planning the funeral so as to personalize the funeral services. He also emphasizes follow-up ministries for months or a full year after a loss, and suggests that pastors visit, call, or send a letter to the survivors on special holidays and the first anniversary day of the death of their loved one.

Oates deals with types of grief and separation throughout the stages of the life, beginning with birth which is the first human experience of separation, when the infant leaves the mother's womb. He addresses the grief of children who face the death of a parent, a grandparent, or sibling. In particular, he deals the wide variety of losses experienced by adults, losses that include the death of a spouse, the death of a child, spontaneous miscarriage, abortion, the birth of a malformed child, and murdered children. Many persons over sixty-five experience the death of a child, a grandchild, or a friend, as well as their own bodily functions. Oates emphasizes that in this series of life cycle crises, what is most helpful is to have faith in Jesus who has gone through life, death, burial and resurrection. Oates believes that faith in Jesus helps the bereaved to transition successfully to a new stage of life.

Thus, he emphasizes that pastoral care of grief ministry must deliver the message that the life of Jesus Christ gives us meaning and purpose as Jesus showed in his ministry to Lazarus, Martha, Mary, and Jairus. While other theologians focus more on the presence of God in coping with grief, Oates focuses on Jesus' ministry to mourners, his own suffering, death, and resurrection in providing the bereaved with pastoral care.

In a different sense, Carrie Doehring provides pastors with detailed resources that tell how to identify and respond to loss by paying attention to contextual realities and cultural discourses. In *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach*, Doehring

identifies three major issues that pastoral care ministry must address, including loss, violence, and unhealthy ways of coping with stress, which name what almost all careseekers are experiencing.<sup>98</sup> Although Doebling deals with grief indirectly, she indicates that a primary focus of pastoral care needs to be crisis intervention, noting that mourning losses is the primary form of crises within pastoral ministry.<sup>99</sup> For Doebling, loss is “the most common source of human suffering,” which includes life-cycle transitions such as leaving home, marriage, divorce, retirement, and death, using Mitchell and Anderson’s types of loss.<sup>100</sup>

Influenced by a constructivist psychological approach, Doebling emphasizes the need to reconstruct life stories in that the pastoral caregiver helps bereaved individuals coauthor their lives meaningfully in order to reconnect with the deceased in their families and communities and bring healing. In addition, she also emphasizes the role of religious and spiritual practices that can help the bereaved gain a sense of divine guidance.

Doebling’s final goal of pastoral care is to seek healing and justice in which caregivers attend to careseekers’ safety, help them to mourn the losses, and assist them to reconnect with ordinary life by being fully present in the moment.<sup>101</sup> For performing this task effectively, Doebling suggests a “cross-disciplinary approach,” which is a correlational method that develops contextual narrative understandings of persons in crisis by drawing from theological, psychological, social and cultural perspectives.<sup>102</sup> It is a “psycho-spiritual-social perspective” that can help pastors plan care for bereaved

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<sup>98</sup> Carrie Doebling, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 65.

<sup>99</sup> Doebling, 7, 65.

<sup>100</sup> Doebling, 70, 74-76.

<sup>101</sup> Doebling, 133-41.

<sup>102</sup> Doebling, 9.

individuals that will allow them to express grief fully, by considering their family, community, and culture.<sup>103</sup> This insight will be helpful for my study as I consider various aspects of parental grief in interpreting the experience of the loss of a child.

On the other hand, the book *Reflections on Grief and Spiritual Growth* is written by 20 authors most of whom are practical theologians. They include Herbert Anderson, Duane Bidwell, Bonnie Miller-McLemore, Donald Messer, Susan White, William Willimon, among others. They were asked to write a personal and reflective essay on the impact loss had on their lives and faith. Authors share their experiences of the loss of their parents, children, friends, and neighbors. Through experiencing such losses and grief, they gained deep understanding of human life, death, and relationship. They offer meaningful messages about the relationships between loss and spiritual growth.

Anderson emphasizes that bereaved individuals need hope to heal their broken hearts through various resources, including empathetic words, songs, stories, and rituals. Particularly, Anderson states that the life, death and resurrection of Christ encourage bereaved persons to maintain their hope in the love of God.<sup>104</sup> R. Esteban Montilla, in his essay “Grieving and Reconnecting in Community,” also indicates that hope “helps us face our present pains and hurts with the certainty that we have the power to transform them and, with God’s strength, can construct a better world.”<sup>105</sup> He believes that hope is the center of Christian faith and beliefs, which helps bereaved persons to get through their grief and give them opportunity to grow in the grieving process.

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<sup>103</sup> Doebling, 73.

<sup>104</sup> Herbert Anderson, “Moments of Loss, Seasons of Grief,” in *Reflections on Grief and Spiritual Growth*, ed. Andrew J. Weaver and Howard W. Stone (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 28.

<sup>105</sup> R. Esteban Montilla, “Grieving and Reconnecting in Community,” in *Reflections on Grief and Spiritual Growth*, ed. Andrew J. Weaver and Howard W. Stone (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 112.

Montilla views grief as reconstruction of meaning, relearning the world, and reconnection with the dead. He said, "It is important to keep in mind that people die, not our relationship with them."<sup>106</sup> Seeing grief from the perspective of the continuing bond theory, he emphasizes an ongoing relationship with the deceased. Similarly, in his essay "We Will Be Changed: Resurrection and Grief," Bidwell also supports continued bonds with the deceased, criticizing early psychological view of grieving as a "letting go" process.<sup>107</sup> Some other authors seem to agree that maintaining relationship with the deceased comforts bereaved individuals and helps their grieving process.

Charles Merrick who had served over fifty years as a funeral director wrote about his own experience of his son's death. For him, it is impossible to have closure. He said, "Closure, for us, will come only with our own deaths."<sup>108</sup> Merrick states that traditional rituals including viewing, funeral and burial service had great meaning at the time of loss of his son. As Merrick had seen thousands of funerals as a funeral director, he emphasizes the importance of the personalized ritual and pastoral presence. However, he indicates that "clergy underestimate how important they are when a member of their church dies. Just being there means so much to the family."<sup>109</sup>

Donald E. Messer uses C. S. Lewis's analogy of "Patches of Godlight" to explain how God helps people who walk through the valley of death and grief.<sup>110</sup> He writes,

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<sup>106</sup> Montilla, 106.

<sup>107</sup> Duane R. Bidwell, "We Will Be Changed: Resurrection and Grief," in *Reflections on Grief and Spiritual Growth*, ed. Andrew J. Weaver and Howard W. Stone (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 40.

<sup>108</sup> Charles Merrick, "I Would Do It All Again," in *Reflections on Grief and Spiritual Growth*, ed. Andrew J. Weaver and Howard W. Stone (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 74.

<sup>109</sup> Merrick, 76.

<sup>110</sup> Donald E. Messer, "Patches of Godlight," in *Reflections on Grief and Spiritual Growth*, ed. Andrew J. Weaver and Howard W. Stone (Nashville: Abingdon

The God of Jesus Christ is a suffering God, who is wounded by our tragedies and hurting because of our sorrow; a God who lost an only son on a cross, thanks to human cruelty and injustice; a God who does not punish us for our sins by sending sickness; a God who Jesus tells us does not control every detail of life—accidents happen and towers fall on both the good and the bad—a God who cares and cries.<sup>111</sup>

For Messer, a patch of Godlight means also finding ways of embracing life, having companions, holding hope, and expressing feelings in the midst of pain and grief. In addition, he emphasizes that “the hope of the resurrection” is fundamental to the “patch of Godlight” that helps him “see beyond the present pain, grief, and tragedy.”<sup>112</sup>

Although not all essays in the book are academic writings, they contain insightful lessons about grief from theological and biblical perspectives.

#### Parental Grief and Spirituality

Therese A. Rando edited a massive volume titled *Parental Loss of a Child*. This book is a compilation of articles that address different perspectives of the parental loss, issues rising from the specific types of death of the child, the socially disfranchised parental bereavements, different experiences, and types of treatment intervention. This book emphasizes the uniqueness of parental grief and the need for professional consideration. Rando asserts appropriate treatment and intervention needs in accordance with different types of bereavement. Thus, the purpose of this book is to provide practical information for “professionals in all disciplines with the experience of parental loss of a child.”<sup>113</sup>

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Press, 2005), 82.

<sup>111</sup> Messer, 83.

<sup>112</sup> Messer, 86.

<sup>113</sup> Therese A. Rando, ed., *Parental Loss of a Child* (Champaign, Illinois: Research Press Company, 1986), xiii.

In each chapter, authors deal with various issues in specific types of death involving miscarriage, stillbirth, newborn death, death from accident, illness, suicide, murder, and death of an adult child. The subjective experiences of the death of mother, father, single parent, and surviving children are described. Marital and family relationships after death of a child are examined in order for counselors and therapists to assist bereaved parents and surviving family members. However, no authors have expressed an interest in spiritual connection with the dead child and the role of religion and spirituality in the time of bereavement. In the chapter, "Individual and Couples Treatment Following the Death of a Child," Rando describes rituals as powerful therapeutic experiences that can provide bereaved parents with healing and continuity.<sup>114</sup>

William Worden describes parental experiences of the death of a child in a chapter about types of death in *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy* including stillbirth, SIDS, sudden and anticipated chronic diseases. Worden stresses that child death is a traumatic experience that causes complicated grief reactions, and describes how bereaved parents react to the loss of a child emotionally and behaviorally. Worden notes that sometimes yearning for the dead child prompts parents to return to the hospital, intensive care unit, or emergency room where their child died. Behaviorally, bereaved parents experience inability to concentrate, disorganization, disorientation, withdrawal or hyperactivity. In addition, Worden indicates that bereaved parents may experience hallucinations. Thus, it is not unusual for them to see their child in a crowd, hear the child's voice, or feel the child's presence.

In contrast to psychoanalytic grief theories, I find that current study of parental

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<sup>114</sup> Therese A. Rando, "Individual and Couples Treatment Following the Death of a Child," in *Parental Loss of a Child*, ed. Therese A. Rando (Champaign, IL: Research Press, 1986), 402.

grief has two emphases. First, parental grief is non-linear. Second, spiritual connection with the dead child is helpful in coping with grief. Mary Sormanti and Judith August indicate that many professionals seem to agree that parental grief is unique to parents and may be lifelong.<sup>115</sup> Instead of letting go of an emotional connection with the deceased child, many authors emphasize a continuous relationship with the dead child as a way to manage their grief and integrate it into their lives. Thus, Sormanti and August assert that it is important for parental grief studies to explore what factors affect bereaved parents' maintenance of the relationship with their dead child as they cope with their grief. They interviewed 43 bereaved parents to examine spiritual connections with deceased children and its impact on the grieving process.

Their research findings show that many parents maintain an ongoing relationship with their deceased child by "visiting their children's gravesides, praying, or talking with them," which resulted in a feeling of their child's presence.<sup>116</sup> Sormanti and August report that many parents describe experiences of spiritual connections to the deceased child as positive. Sormanti and August conclude that parental experiences of spiritual connection after loss of their child provide bereaved parents with reassurance and hope so as to manage better their day-to-day life. Thus, it is natural that the spiritual connection with the dead child is associated with religious beliefs such as faith in God, heaven, and an afterlife.

There is another body of literature that emphasizes the long-term effect of parental grief. Ann Finkbeiner who experienced the loss of her son in a train accident describes the lives of bereaved parents in *After the Death of a Child*. She interviewed 30

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<sup>115</sup> Sormanti and August, 460.

<sup>116</sup> Sormanti and August, 463.

bereaved parents whose children had died five years earlier in order to examine the effects of the child's death on their relationship with themselves and the outside world. From the research, she gathered two important facts: first, the death of a child is disorienting; thus bereaved parents search for a way to make sense of the loss. Second, death of a child has long-term effects. She indicates that it is impossible for bereaved parents to let go of a child. She argues that the death of a child is not something to recover from, but to live with. Throughout the book, she explores how bereaved parents maintain the bond with the deceased child.

From a similar perspective, Judith Bernstein wrote the book, *When the Bough Breaks: Forever after the Death of a Son or Daughter* to provide comfort and guidance to those who have experienced the death of a child and who work with bereaved parents. Because she experienced the death of her own child, Bernstein speaks from the dual perspectives of bereaved parent and psychologist. This book is based on her research on "long-term effects of losing a child."<sup>117</sup> Bernstein finds that many bereaved parents experience positive changes in terms of relationships, philosophies, and social activities. For example, marital and family relationships after loss of a child become closer and stronger rather than estranged and divorced. In addition, Bernstein indicated that many bereaved parents regard their deceased child as a member of the family by memorializing the child in various ways: going to the cemetery, lighting memorial candles, looking at pictures, and sharing stories.

Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, Joan Arnold and Penelope Gemma studied the experiences of bereaved parents in order to understand and support

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<sup>117</sup> Judith R. Bernstein, *When the Bough Breaks: Forever After The Death of A Son or Daughter* (Kansas City, MO: Andrews and McMeel Publishing, 1998), xvii.



parental grief as a continually evolving process.<sup>118</sup> The results show that parental grief is a complex and ongoing process. They stated that grieving continues and can be related to a multitude of other emotions. Arnold and Gemma believed that continued grieving gives bereaved parents life satisfaction as the nature of parental grieving is “positive and life-transforming.”<sup>119</sup> Respondents’ answers support the conviction. A majority of them replied that their lives were changed including careers, volunteer efforts, and gaining an increased capacity for compassion for other grieving families.

Arnold and Gemma’s research is valuable not only in providing a deeper understanding of parental grief, but also in confirming that it continues over lifetimes, which maintains parents’ connection to the child. By integrating the loss into their lives, bereaved parents can keep the relationship with their dead child and enhance the relationship with their surviving children as their perspectives on life continue to evolve. In this sense, the ongoing grieving process can be “the lifelong transformative connection.”<sup>120</sup> Addressing that point, religion and spirituality function as ways to cherish the memory of the child and to maintain an ongoing relationship with the deceased child, particularly by offering rituals, belief in afterlife, and hope for reunion.

Arnold and Gemma assert the important role of religion and spirituality in the grieving process. They indicate that many respondents got help from their faith in God. Some parents describe the faith community as the heart of their lives. For others, belief in an afterlife helps them think their child is not suffering, they can be reunited, and the dead child is looking after the surviving children. In particular, belief in God is associated

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<sup>118</sup> Joan Arnold and Penelope Bushman Gemma, “The Continuing Process of Parental Grief,” *Death Studies* 32 (2008): 659.

<sup>119</sup> Arnold and Gemma, 661-62.

<sup>120</sup> Arnold and Gemma, 672.

with the issue of acceptance. The result indicates that some parents accepted the death of their child with the belief that “the child is with God and cared for now by God.”<sup>121</sup> This confidence makes the parents hope to see their deceased child after they die.

Bernstein emphasizes the function of rituals as a religious coping mechanism. She states that rituals offer direction during the initial state of disorientation and confusion, serve to help the bereaved accept the reality of the loss, and bring people together.<sup>122</sup> She states that many interviewees rarely mention members of the clergy as sources of help in spite of clergy’s universal role in rituals. One of the interviewees describes an experience with an unhelpful priest:

I went to the priest in my parish; he mumbled something about prayer. I asked him how much education he had in bereavement and he said he had a course in the seminary. I walked out of there and never spoke to the clergy about my pain again.<sup>123</sup>

This indicates that spiritual leaders need to learn more about the grief process and have proper resources to provide spiritual care for the bereaved parents. As a religious resource, Bernstein indicates that belief in an afterlife and reunion with loved ones plays an important role in consoling bereaved parents. Although her book is not written from a Christian perspective, Bernstein gives some insights into how religious or spiritual resources function for bereaved parents.

Finkbeiner’s primary focus is on marital and family relationships after loss in *After the Death of a Child*. She deals with religious faith in one chapter. She states that bereaved parents are struggling to make sense of the painful event just as Job searched for the meaning of his suffering. It is hard for bereaved parents to accept God’s

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<sup>121</sup> Arnold and Gemma, 668.

<sup>122</sup> Bernstein, 205.

<sup>123</sup> Bernstein, 210.

“gratuitous cruelty,” although Job’s story presents a happy ending.<sup>124</sup> However, Finkbeiner indicates that attending a church and having faith in God helps bereaved parents make sense of their pain and suffering and find meaning in what feels like an unjust loss.

In trying to make sense of the loss of a child, most of the parents struggle to find answers to the question: Why would a merciful God let their innocent children suffer and die? In the article, Judith Cook and Dale Wimberley explore the nature of parental bereavement theodicies and examine the relationship between explanations for the death and ability to cope with the death of a child. They identify five types of theodicies based on their research of 145 bereaved Christian parents. The first type of theodicy includes blaming or questioning the merciful God. The second type is blaming self; seeing the death as a punishment caused by survivors for wrong doing. The third type involves the explanation of death as purposive, intended by God to serve a good purpose. The fourth and fifth types of theodicy were mentioned by a few of respondents. In both types, parents refuse to bestow any meaning on the death of their child by imputing the death to fate or nature.

From the results of the study, Cook and Wimberley construct “a typology of theodicies” that enables them to examine the relationship between these explanations and the role of religion in adjusting to bereavement.<sup>125</sup> In particular, the first two explanations help the parents by supporting the belief that they will reunite with the deceased child in heaven and make meaning of the death of their child as “serving a

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<sup>124</sup> Ann K. Finkbeiner, *After the Death of a Child: Living with the Loss through the Years* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 157.

<sup>125</sup> Cook and Wimberley, 230.

noble purpose.”<sup>126</sup> However, the third explanation is less beneficial to the parents in coping with the death, particularly bereaved fathers who interpret the death as a punishment because of their “heavy drinking, failure to attend church, and participation in extramarital sexual affairs.”<sup>127</sup> Thus, the study of Cook and Wimberley indicates that religious faith has a positive effect on bereaved parents coping with their grief, but they may not be provided with comfort as it provokes religious guilt. Cook and Wimberley state that “religious commitment is both a cause and a consequence of the process of adjustment to bereavement.”<sup>128</sup>

In the literature on pregnancy loss, *A Silent Sorrow* provides comfort, guidance and hope to parents who have experienced this loss, whether through miscarriage, stillbirth, or newborn death, which are not paid as much attention by the public as is the death of a living child. Ingrid Kohn and Perry-Lynn Moffitt explore the important topic of pregnancy loss and suggest ways the bereaved mother and father can cope with their loss. They stress that bereaved parents need to have compassion on themselves, and medical professionals, family members, and neighbors need to validate their feelings adequately so that they can mourn for their unborn or born child.

In a chapter, Kohn and Moffitt deal with religious coping as a way to find solace. They indicate that the clergy tend to offer monotonous words in comforting bereaved parents because the clergy person is unsettled by pregnancy loss and infant death.<sup>129</sup> Kohn and Moffitt describe various traditions of religious rituals emphasizing the important role of a good-bye ritual. In the appendix of their book, they provide ritual

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<sup>126</sup> Cook and Wimberley, 229.

<sup>127</sup> Cook and Wimberley, 230.

<sup>128</sup> Cook and Wimberley, 237.

<sup>129</sup> Ingrid Kohn and Perry-Lynn Moffitt, *A Silent Sorrow: Pregnancy Loss: Guidance and Support for You and Your Family* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 126.

resources from Christian tradition for pregnancy loss and newborn death that can bring about consolation and healing. Kohn and Moffitt give detailed guidance to bereaved parents for ways to personalize the rituals. They include rituals for a miscarried baby, pregnancy loss, a subsequent pregnancy, and ending a pregnancy.

Alex Mabe and Michael Dawes explore what Christian faith can offer bereaved parents. They identify five fundamental Christian resources for bereaved Christian parents, including faith in a good and powerful God, knowledge of God's Word, relationship with Jesus Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the fellowship of believers. However, their analysis of the resources is not based on empirical research, and they state that these resources are potentially available to the bereaved Christian parents, although such support may not be as available as it should be.<sup>130</sup> In other words, their analysis of fundamental Christian resources comes from their assumptive belief. Because they are psychologists, although they use biblical concepts, they in fact look at the importance of Christian faith through a non-theological lens.

Christian faith in the triune God facilitates parents in times of bereavement. However, I will argue that the criticism offered by Mabe and Dawes about the resources available from faith has little credibility when evaluated outside a theological perspective. For example, they stress that "the mere declaration of being Christian may provide little or no comfort for their loss."<sup>131</sup> "Being Christian" has an obscure meaning. They go on to say,

Christian parents who are unaware of the resources of comfort in their faith or, even worse, have inappropriate expectations of God and his purposes, may lose

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<sup>130</sup> P. Alex Mabe and Michael Dawes, "When a Child Dies: The Impact of Being a Christian," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 19, no. 4 (1991): 335.

<sup>131</sup> Mabe and Dawes, 341.

their faith and their child during the agony of their bereavement.<sup>132</sup>

Their use of the words such as “inappropriate expectations” and “his purposes” are abstract. It reminds me of “mature faith” and “immature faith” in *Good Grief* when Westberg stresses the importance of a strong relationship with God in coping with grief. I believe that faith is an individual relationship with God, and no one can judge the strength or validity of another’s faith. In addition, it is natural that bereaved individuals search for meaning of life in their faith tradition and rely on the ultimate being God even though they are “unaware of the resources of comfort in their faith.” Mabe and Dawes also fail to describe how Christian resources can be applied to a specific situation. Thus, it seems that they deal merely with grief in general without a profound understanding of the experiences of bereaved parents or of Christian theology.

On the other hand, John Munday and Frances Wohlenhaus-Munday describe from a Christian perspective a mother’s struggle to cope with the loss of a child in their book *Surviving the Death of a Child*. It is not a scholarly book, but Munday explores their lived parental experiences as they were associated with faith in God during their most stressful time in life. Munday indicates that the life of Jesus and meaning of Jesus’ life is their source of comfort. Munday believes that bereaved parents at some point in the grieving process need to step again into the continuing process of life to serve a useful function in society. Helping others is a way to improve their ability to function, which can give meaning “to the life that was lost as well as the lives of those who continue.”<sup>133</sup> Munday stresses his belief that hope for healing, faith in God, and love for others are important elements in the struggle to survive. To cherish the memory of a deceased child, Munday

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<sup>132</sup> Mabe and Dawes, 341.

<sup>133</sup> John Munday, with Frances Wohlenhaus-Munday, *Surviving the Death of a Child* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 61.

suggests bereaved parents engage in meaningful activities such as volunteering to help dying children and participating in campaigns to prevent the death of children.

Peter VanKatwyk explores parental loss and marital grief from a narrative perspective through a case study of the sudden death of a child. VanKatwyk indicates that narrative therapy evaluates how individuals' life stories are structured and provides ways for individuals to rewrite destructive stories into alternative healthier versions. He states that pastoral care is grounded in the narrative framework of all biblical stories of Israel and the story of Jesus, which "direct life and practice in the faith community."<sup>134</sup> He sees that narratives consist of relational, social, and cultural perspectives as a complex body. From the case of bereaved parents Maya and Peter, VanKatwyk draws on a prominent theme that is related to their immigration narrative, and he illustrates a theological reflection of immigration from the stories of Abraham, the Exodus, and the death and resurrection of Jesus.

VanKatwyk believes that grieving is "the process of addressing losses," and in the context of pastoral care the stories about losses can be heard, reflected on, and interpreted with a theological language.<sup>135</sup> He asserts the importance of rituals that mark endings and beginnings. He believes that through creatively constructing new rituals, pastoral care for bereaved parents can be enhanced for remembrance and transition. In his conclusion, VanKatwyk emphasizes the roles of rituals, pastoral presence, and theological reflection through narrative scriptures for pastoral grief ministry. In a simple case study, VanKatwyk provides an understanding of the narrative approach for grief ministry.

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<sup>134</sup> Peter L VanKatwyk, "Parental Loss and Marital Grief: A Pastoral and Narrative Perspective," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 52, no. 4 (1998): 369.

<sup>135</sup> VanKatwyk, 375.

Seen from the larger framework of practical theology, the perspective of his narrative seems to be a theological interpretation in terms of finding sources from biblical analysis and retelling stories associated with the interpretation, while incorporating socio-cultural factors. I think that the narrative perspective with its meaning-making theory is an important part of grief counseling for ministers. I will explore in greater detail this narrative approach to parental loss in an attempt to have a conversation with found themes from my research in the interpretive chapter. In addition, the work of Dennis Klass will be explored for practical theological reflection in that chapter. Klass is an authoritative voice for the continuing bond theory of grief, and he addresses the very issue of the spiritual aspect of parental grief in the book, *The Spiritual Lives of Bereaved Parents*.



## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

This chapter will explain the research method that was utilized and the process of data collection and data analysis that were designed in accordance with the method. This chapter begins with an explanation of the qualitative method as it is used in practical theology. As this research is based on phenomenology, a brief history and description of types of phenomenological approaches are explored. In particular, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was selected for this study from among various phenomenological approaches that are appropriate for exploring the experience of bereaved parents. In the second part of this chapter, the course of this research is described including the process of participant recruitment, the in-depth interviews, transcription, data collection, and data analysis.

#### Research Method

##### Rationale for Qualitative Method in Practical Theology

A qualitative approach is justified for this practical theological study. Many practical theologians prefer to use qualitative methods that value subjectivity to understand and interpret meaning and essence of a particular human experience. In contrast to quantitative methods that focus on scientific knowledge, qualitative research centers on ideographic truth, which is important in practical theology in that it appreciates the uniqueness of individual experience and includes the language of scripture and tradition.<sup>136</sup> The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of Korean bereaved parents and discover the role of Christian spirituality in coping with the loss of a child.

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<sup>136</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 43-44.

Their experiences are unique, and thus cannot be generalized, measured or theoretically understood. Qualitative research reflects seriously on human experience and understands the complexity of human experience.

Van der Ven emphasizes the role of empirical research in practical theology, which offers methods and tools to describe and explain the lived experiences of people. Through analysis and evaluation of the texts within lived experiences, it provides people with guidelines for religious praxis that can connect experiences to the texts and the contexts.<sup>137</sup> Swinton and Mowat believe that empirical research in practical theology can provide our understanding of human experience with rich fresh insights. They attempt to bring together theology and qualitative research. Social sciences offer “complementary knowledge” that enhances theological understanding, and theology uses the knowledge to interpret human experience with this newly shaped perspective.<sup>138</sup>

In particular, this study looks for crucial elements in Christian spirituality that are helpful to bereaved parents in living through their grieving process, including search for the meaning of life, experience of sacred moments, rituals, relationship with God and Jesus, community of faith, and values and purpose of life. Social sciences can offer support in understanding and interpreting the experience of bereaved parents accurately and abundantly. Theology deals with issues of Christian life and spirituality, and the social sciences do not.<sup>139</sup> For that reason—even though both theology and the social sciences have equal positions and independent roles in qualitative research—in this study the theological perspective will be given logical priority.

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<sup>137</sup> van der Ven, 20.

<sup>138</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 85.

<sup>139</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 86.

For Swinton and Mowat, practical theology is “a form of action research.”<sup>140</sup> The goal of practical theology is not only to “see the world differently,” but also to “create changes” in Christian faith and practice.<sup>141</sup> Because I believe that practical theology is a faithful practice for the church, the use of qualitative research methods in practical theology draws on Christian practice interacting with “the practices of the world” and “enabling faithful participation in God’s redemptive practices, to and for the world.”<sup>142</sup> Practical theology focuses on how Christians practice God’s commands in complicated human lives so that Christian communities can keep their faithful relationship with God. Thus, Christian communities need to understand the practice of God and discern what God is doing in the world and what God is calling them to do today.

In a similar sense, James Poling and Donald Miller emphasize the importance of “the relationship of living Christian community and theological interpretation.”<sup>143</sup> For them, practical theology enables the faith community to evaluate practices and direct further action through a continuing interpretation of life experience and story reflecting upon what God has done and is doing for the world.<sup>144</sup> Thus, the Christian community is a theological locus, and the theological interpretation involves a guided process that is crucial for the community and leadership to discern and participate in God’s transformative works.<sup>145</sup> In this sense, the ultimate purpose of this study is to provide a revised form of practice for pastors and church leaders in taking care of bereaved parents through theological reflection and interpretation.

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<sup>140</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 255.

<sup>141</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 255.

<sup>142</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 6.

<sup>143</sup> James N. Poling and Donald E. Miller, *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 10.

<sup>144</sup> Poling and Miller, 10-12.

<sup>145</sup> Poling and Miller, 13.

The task of practical theology is to enable faithful practices by evaluating shared practices and interpreting experiences in light of Scripture and tradition. In order to accomplish the task of practical theology, Swinton and Mowat stress the importance of human experience. They recognize that the gospel cannot be completed only by belief, but by practice that reflects Christians believe. Seen from this perspective, human experience is a place where the gospel is grounded, acted on and interpreted.<sup>146</sup> In order to interpret a particular experience that takes place in a specific situation, it is necessary for practical theology to be open to diverse aspects of theological interpretation because the context of human experiences is too complicated to apply to it a single theological perspective. Therefore, practical theology needs qualitative methodology to explore human experiences with careful theological interpretation of particular situations.

### Phenomenology

Among the various qualitative methods, phenomenology will be used to explore the experience of bereaved parents. The aim of phenomenology is to describe lived human experience, make sense of it, and identify the essence of a phenomenon.<sup>147</sup> Modern phenomenology was founded by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) who developed the theoretical ground of phenomenology as “the study of the essence of consciousness.”<sup>148</sup> Husserl sees “consciousness” as “intentional” awareness or behavior toward something, and phenomenology researchers study both “human acts of consciousness” and “objects of awareness” as people experience them.<sup>149</sup> Husserl

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<sup>146</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 5.

<sup>147</sup> Linda Finlay, *Phenomenology for Therapists: Researching the Lived World* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 10.

<sup>148</sup> Finlay, 44.

<sup>149</sup> Finlay, 45.

emphasizes phenomenological *reduction* and *bracket* to see a phenomenon in its essence. Thus, phenomenological research needs a process to put aside scientific preconceptions and purify natural attitudes so that the researcher strives to find the essential meaning of phenomena.

Husserl's philosophical views of phenomenology were developed by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). A student of Husserl, Heidegger explored the nature of being, the ontological question of human existence. Heidegger described the human being as *Dasein* or "being-in-the-world."<sup>150</sup> Heidegger seized the role of phenomenology as interpretive or hermeneutic because the essence of human understanding is hermeneutic. He argued against Husserl's ideas of reduction and bracketing which suggests that the interpretation of the experience of humans as being-in-the-world inevitably comes from "fore-having," "fore-sight," and "fore-conception."<sup>151</sup> In other words, without an ontological understanding of human experience, phenomenology cannot grasp any explanatory scheme. The existential phenomenology of Heidegger was expanded by Jean-Paul Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Sartre used phenomenological description to explain fundamental features of lived experience, and Merleau-Ponty explored what constitutes perception and body-world with his understanding of the fundamental role of perception in a bodily way.<sup>152</sup>

In conducting phenomenological research, it is important to achieve rigorous quality of research in accordance with a philosophy of phenomenology. Magus Englander indicates that phenomenological research is often conducted in a way inconsistent with

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<sup>150</sup> Finlay, 51.

<sup>151</sup> Finlay, 52-53.

<sup>152</sup> Finlay, 54-60.

phenomenological criteria and philosophical premises.<sup>153</sup> The method selected for data collection and analysis needs to be compatible with whatever philosophy of phenomenology is guiding the study. There are two philosophically different types of phenomenological approach: descriptive and hermeneutic. Descriptive phenomenological research follows Husserl's view of phenomenology as a method of critical reflection that regards the experiences of participants as factual data. Descriptive phenomenology focuses on the accurate description of the human experience maintaining it as true fact. Scholars such as Clark Moustakas, Amedeo Giorgi and Barbro Giorgi stand in that tradition.

In contrast to the descriptive phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology draws on lived experience with interpretation through a reflexive lens. This philosophy builds on the hermeneutic and existential philosophical foundation of Heidegger; this research tradition was solidified by other hermeneutic scholars such as Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) and Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995). The distinctive characteristics of hermeneutic phenomenology involve "explicit use of interpretation" and "reflexive acknowledgment of researcher's involvement."<sup>154</sup> Interpretation is required to find the way that meanings arise within the context of each participant, and it takes place through data collection and the analytic process. Hermeneutic researchers are interested in exploring the human condition by engaging in modes beyond the scientific, and they are allowed to include an active evaluation of their own experience. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a complex dialogue that has as its

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<sup>153</sup> Magnus Englander, "The Interview: Data Collection in Descriptive Phenomenological Human Scientific Research," *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 43 (2012), 14.

<sup>154</sup> Finlay, 111-14.

purpose to find new understanding between “the researcher’s pre-understandings and the current research process.”<sup>155</sup>

### Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

In the previous section of this chapter, I briefly examined the history of phenomenology and its approaches. I have adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological approach for the current study because it offers the most accurate way to understand and unveil the meaning of the experience of bereaved parents. In particular, I use the approach of IPA (Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis) among other hermeneutic approaches. It is a specific version of hermeneutic phenomenology, and currently a method increasingly used in the field of health psychology, counseling psychology, and occupational therapy, particularly in the United Kingdom.<sup>156</sup> IPA was grounded on Husserl’s phenomenological philosophy and hermeneuticists such as Heidegger, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre who contributed to a view of the person as embedded in the lived world. This view necessarily requires interpretation in order to make meaning out of personal activities and experiences.

I think that IPA is most suitable for the current study whose purpose is to explicate bereaved parents’ experience and to explore the role of Christian spirituality in coping with their grief, in that IPA researchers are interested in “what happens when the everyday flow of lived experience takes on a particular significance for people.”<sup>157</sup> The loss of a child is an important, tragic event in people’s lives. IPA research is an approach

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<sup>155</sup> Finlay, 114.

<sup>156</sup> Finlay, 139.

<sup>157</sup> Jonathan Smith, Paul Flowers, and Michael Larkin, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2009), 1.

committed to the exploration of the lived experience of a particular phenomenon, such as loss of a child, to help individuals make sense of the experience. IPA research makes it possible to connect the experience with the researcher's own views as a way to interpret the particular phenomenon and interactions between the researcher and the participant.<sup>158</sup>

Finlay explains three important facets of IPA methodology.<sup>159</sup> First is a reflective focus on the participants' experiences. IPA researchers ask participants about personal views of their experiences with reflexivity and imprinting in the process of data collection. Second is an "idiographic sensibility," which is disclosed by the researcher's commitment to "understanding experiential phenomena from the particular individuals in particular contexts."<sup>160</sup> In particular, the researcher seeks for connections and patterns in each analysis and across the analysis of multiple cases. Third is the hermeneutic commitment. The aim of the interpretation is to provide a conceptual comment on the participant's experience so that the researcher reconstructs the original description in its own terms. There is room for the IPA researcher to further develop the interpretation by constructing a narrative or bringing in metaphors and drawing on theoretical perspectives to more fully understand the text.<sup>161</sup>

In IPA research, the research questions need to focus on the meaning of their experiences, and they should be open-ended. The sample size used by Smith et al. suggested for Ph.D dissertations is about six participants, but it depends on the research question and the quality of the data gathered. The informed consent must be obtained from each participant who is provided with the statement of confidentiality. Above all,

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<sup>158</sup> Finlay, 140.

<sup>159</sup> Finlay, 140-41.

<sup>160</sup> Finlay, 140.

<sup>161</sup> Finlay, 141.



Smith et al. indicate that IPA researchers need “open-mindedness,” “flexibility,” “patience” and “empathy” to enter into the participant’s world.<sup>162</sup> In compliance with all principles and perspectives of IPA, I designed and conducted the current research project from participant recruitment and structuring of the interview to data collection and data analysis.

### Research Design

#### Data Collection

##### *Participants*

Three Korean bereaved couples and three individual Korean bereaved parents were recruited through emails and phone calls to pastors of churches. In order to recruit participants, I sent a letter to 52 pastors of Korean United Methodist churches in Southern California, pastors of five Korean mega churches in Southern California where they have more than 1,000 members, and pastors of Korean United Methodist churches located in cities of other states such as Chicago, New York, and Atlanta where Korean populations are high (appendix I). Because I did not receive a response, I contacted them by phone. Through the letter or phone call I asked if they have among their members any bereaved parents who are five years past the loss of their child. If pastors had those bereaved parents, I asked them for detailed information of the potential participants to check if they fit into the standard that I had set up, and I asked them to refer these parents to me for this research project.

Most of the pastors were very cautious about introducing the bereaved parents to me because talking to bereaved parents about their deceased child is an extremely

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<sup>162</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 55.

sensitive matter. Some pastors refused; a few of them responded to me positively. After an initial contact with the parents from their pastor, I contacted the referred bereaved parents by phone, first to check if their condition met my research standard and second to be certain they would be willing to participate in my research interview. In the process of recruiting participants, however, I realized that there were two problems with the standard of interview object.

First, I had initially set the standard of bereaved parents who had lost their child five to ten years before. However, I noticed that many bereaved parents in these years were still struggling with the loss of their child, and did not want to participate in my interview. Even for the pastors of their church, it has been difficult to deal with the loss of a child and to care for bereaved parents over the past five to ten years. Thus, after a discussion with my advisor, I changed the length of time from five to ten to five to fifteen. As a result, I had interviews with three bereaved parents more than 10 years after the death of their child.

Second, this interview was designed initially to work with bereaved couples. The problem was that some wives or husbands among the bereaved couples refused to participate in the interview. I had to wait a long time for their responses until she or he said no. In this process, I had two assumptions. In cases of the husband's refusal, it was related to Korean patriarchal culture. Two wives among the bereaved parents mentioned that their husbands are Korean men, which can be interpreted to mean they preserve the traditional values of men's role in the family. Despite the cultural changes taking place in Korea which challenge the traditional Korean cultural stereotypes, Korean men are still inclined not to discuss such emotionally intense experiences with strangers; Korean men

are culturally expected to be taciturn and work through their emotions on their own. In cases of the wife's refusal, the death of a child was too traumatic and she was unable to get through her grief, although it had been more than 10 years since her child passed away.

After interviews with three bereaved couples, I discussed this issue with my advisor and made the decision to have interviews with individual bereaved parents, thus changing the original interview standard. Included for the interviews were bereaved couples, a wife alone, a husband alone, and a divorced parent. The interviews of individual bereaved parents provided me with a rich understanding not only how Christian spirituality has played an important role for them in coping with the loss of their child, but also how Korean culture has influenced their grieving process. Using grieving individual parents for this research revealed various important aspects of bereaved parents' experiences.

Those interviewed for the project included three bereaved couples and three individual bereaved parents. They are all Christians, and still attend the same church as when the death of their child occurred, with the exception of one bereaved couple. One couple among the participants lost two children in the same year, and other participants experienced the loss of one son or daughter. The causes of death varied: a drowning accident at a swimming pool and a beach, murder, disease such as brain tumor, leukemia, thyroid cancer and respiratory problems. The range in ages at the time of death is from sixteen months to 20 years old. Participants are all bereaved Korean parents, with years since the death of their child ranging from eight to fifteen. All have lived in the USA more than fifteen years.

### *In-depth Interview*

In order to give voice to bereaved parents, my primary research tool was an in-depth interview with open-ended questions that allowed me to explore and understand the meaning of their lived experiences and to discover the role played by Christian spirituality in the grieving process. The interview consists of two sessions. All interviews were audio-recorded. Before the first interview, I presented them with an informed consent to be signed (appendix II), then I asked participants to fill out the background information survey (appendix III). The first interviews were conducted over a period of 60-90 minutes with each participant; the second interviews were 30-60 minutes in length. For the first interview, participants, including couples, were interviewed individually. Interviews were conducted at participants' homes or in a private room of their churches where the participant felt comfortable and secure.

In the first interview, I asked questions that were related to the role of Christian spirituality in coping with the loss of a child, including (1) how Christian beliefs and teachings have helped the participants in their search for meaning and the purpose of their lives after the loss of a child, (2) how they experienced God in the crisis moment, (3) how their Christian community has assisted them, (4) how religious rituals have functioned in helping them to adjust to their lives without their deceased child, (5) how bereaved parents experience sacred or healing moments in their daily lives, and (6) how Christian faith and attitudes have led their lives to change toward themselves and others (appendix IV).

The second session of the interview was held one month after the first session. For couples, it was a joint interview to explore the role of Christian spirituality in coping

jointly with the loss of child. Thus, the second interviews were processed in two steps. First, I brought my reflection on the participant's response to the first interview and asked each participant to respond to what I had written. Second, I asked what particular elements of Christian spirituality have helped the bereaved couple in coping jointly with the loss of their child. However, for the individual bereaved parent, in the first interview I included questions of how the spouse had been helpful in dealing with grief, while the second interview was focused more on a conversation about my written reflection. In the second interview, some participants mentioned the emotional intensity of the first interview and revealed that they had gained new understanding and insights about their experience from the first interview.

Before asking the first question, I tried to build a rapport with the participants using casual conversation as a way to create a comfortable environment for them. I also gave them enough time to answer a question as fully as possible, being careful not to jump in too quickly, and I attentively listened to their stories. After I finished the first and second sets of interviews with the first bereaved couple, I evaluated my interview questions and the process of the interview. From the assessment, I found that I tended to follow the sequence on the schedule of semi-structured questions in the first interview. It seemed that I missed an opportunity to develop participant's concerns and possible emerging concepts. Thus, from the next interview on, after asking the first question, I asked other questions that related to the flow of participants' answers. Sometimes, I questioned spontaneously at certain points, skipped some questions, was careful not to word a question exactly the same way for all participants.

### *Transcription*

A total 12 interviews were audio-recorded and each was transcribed by the researcher right after each interview. As the participants were all immigrants from Korea and familiar with the Korean language, in-depth interviews were conducted and transcribed in Korean. However, the transcriptions were translated later in the process of data analysis by the researcher. After I transcribed the audio-recorded data, I put numbers on each turn of the conversation because a verbatim record is required in the data collection in interpretative phenomenological analysis.<sup>163</sup> I also added non-verbal utterances and made note of significant pauses on each transcription.

### *Research Journal*

From the beginning of the search for interview participants, I have noted the process of my research. On one hand, I included phone and email conversations with pastors, participants, and my advisor. On the other hand, I noted emerging thoughts and feelings during the process of recruiting, interviewing, and transcribing. In particular, writing the journal played an important role in regard to proceeding in the right direction of my research. Right after I interviewed bereaved parents, I attempted to grasp the point of their experiences from among their stories, and I checked if there was anything wrong with my questions and the interview process, which I did for the purpose of constructing better questions and improving my interview skill for the next interviews. All these processes have been written in my research journal. Writing the research journal seemed to me like a conversation with the researcher so as to lead the research process with reflexivity and subjectivity.

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<sup>163</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 73.

### *Reflection Note*

After the transcription of each first interview was complete, I reviewed the transcription and my research journal to write the reflection notes in preparation for the second interview. This process helped me clarify what the participant said and outlined the grieving narrative for each participant. The purpose of the reflection note was to provide participants with an opportunity to review their grieving narratives and give the researcher feedback on the reflection. In the second interview, I brought my reflection notes and read the drafted outline of the participant's grieving narrative. Then, the participant was asked to check the accuracy of the outline and comment on it. After listening to their feedback, I suggested important themes within his or her grieving narrative so that as a cooperative work, the researcher and the participant could look for the meaning of his or her experience, and that could possibly be developed as super-ordinate themes in the coding process.

### *Confidentiality*

I treated the identities of participants as confidential. To protect confidentiality, participants and deceased children were identified by pseudonyms in all research documents. Identifying information about location and circumstances were changed as needed to maintain confidentiality. I hold names, interviews, recordings, transcriptions in a safe folder of my personal computer with password protection until the completion of my dissertation. I will let participants know when my dissertation is completed. However, I asked for permission to keep transcripts and coded data in a secured location for two more years after the completion of my dissertation for the possibility of using them for

future journal articles and publications. However, participants' names and any identifiable references will not be included.

### Data Analysis

IPA analysis is the work of mutual cooperation between the analyst and the participant concerning the meaning of the lived experience of the participant, and it is always tentative and subjective.<sup>164</sup> The goal of data analysis is to understand and explicate the meaning of the bereaved parents' experiences so as to draw from it the role of Christian spirituality in coping with the loss of a child. Once the audio recorded data was transcribed, I attempted to code the data to delineate concepts and categories. I followed the steps developed by Jonathan Smith, Paul Flowers, and Michael Larkin in the book, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*.

The steps they suggested involved (1) reading and re-reading; (2) initial noting; (3) developing emergent themes; (4) search for connections across emergent themes; (5) moving to the next case; and (6) looking for patterns across cases.<sup>165</sup> I grouped these steps into three coding processes including initial analysis, within-case analysis, and across-cases analysis. The data for the analyses included the original transcriptions, exploratory comments, research journal, and reflection note. With subjectivity, I attempted to analyze the data tentatively in order to draw out the particularities and the similarities in the experiences of the bereaved parents.

### *Initial Analysis*

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<sup>164</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 80.

<sup>165</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 82-107.



This phase was important for the researcher to focus on and become immersed in the experience of the participants and to comment on their grieving narratives. This process helped me clearly understand each parent's experience and identify the significant statements of the bereaved parents. In fact, I completed these two steps right after each interview and then proceeded to write reflection notes for the second interview. In these steps, I read the transcription repeatedly, recollected some of my initial thoughts and observations about the interviews, and noted descriptive and interpretive comments, in keeping with the purpose of this step was to produce "a comprehensive and detailed set of notes and comments on the data."<sup>166</sup> I created a three-row table for each participant to help my analysis process as Smith et al. suggested.<sup>167</sup> In the table, I placed the original transcription in the middle and exploratory comments on the right side.

#### *Within-Case Analysis*

This process was to turn the comprehensive exploratory comments into themes. In searching for emergent themes, the task of this step was to break up the narrative flow of each participant and re-organize it so that from the various comments I produced a profound statement. Themes were noted as a type of conceptual phrase on the left side of the three-row table. I checked emergent themes several times whether they are accurately developed in light of the whole text and exploratory comments. Then, I attempted to organize connections and patterns across emergent themes for each interview. In this step, I grouped related themes to identify "super-ordinate themes."<sup>168</sup> I created another table to

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<sup>166</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 82-83.

<sup>167</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 85-87.

<sup>168</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 96-97.

note related themes under the super-ordinate themes for the participant. Then, I moved to the next participant's account and conducted the same process.

### *Across-Cases Analysis*

In this step, I attempted to tie up super-ordinate themes and sub-themes looking for patterns and connections across cases. In this process, it was necessary for me to reconfigure and re-label themes in terms of combining a theme into different cases. I searched for interconnections between recurrent themes, classified the themes under super-ordinate themes that had appeared across more than half of the cases, and identified the final set of themes. Then, I went back to original statements and comments for each interview to validate the final themes and classifications. After all the processes were done, I finalized the categorization of themes. While I preserved the richness of each participant's lived experience in the within-case analysis, I captured the commonalities of the bereaved parents' experiences and extracted crucial roles of Christian spirituality in their grieving process for their deceased child from the across-cases analysis.

### *Trustworthiness*

In a qualitative study, ensuring the trustworthiness of one's research is important to the goal of maintaining the highest quality of the study. Unlike quantitative research, concepts of validity and reliability are irrelevant because qualitative study seeks to gain understanding of the experience, not to explain it. In addition, qualitative research produces findings from natural settings not from statistical procedures. In qualitative research, then, "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research

findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?”<sup>169</sup> Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba proposed four criteria including credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability that correspond to trustworthiness in order to evaluate the process and the outcome of the qualitative study for quality and consistency.<sup>170</sup> I intend to verify the trustworthiness of this study in terms of internal and external validity.

Credibility refers to the idea of “internal consistency” that can be proved by “prolonged engagement with participants,” “researcher reflexivity,” “participant checks,” and “thick descriptions.”<sup>171</sup> In order to maintain authenticity, I checked the original transcribed data repeatedly while I was writing exploratory comments, and I provided participants with the transcript of the audio-taped interview to verify that what was said is what they intended to speak. In addition, my reflections based on the comments were presented to each participant in the second interview to confirm that the researcher clearly understood the participant’s narrative and significant elements of Christian spirituality in coping with the loss of the child. The analysis of IPA is “a joint product of the participant and the analyst.”<sup>172</sup> For that reason, the accuracy of the data and its analysis were tested from the interactions with participants.

On the other hand, transferability as external validity refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other situations. It is almost impossible to generalize findings of a qualitative research because it is conducted under particular environments and with interviews of small numbers of participants. However, I provided

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<sup>169</sup> Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985), 290.

<sup>170</sup> Lincoln and Guba, 290-300.

<sup>171</sup> Susan L. Morrow, “Quality and Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research in Counseling Psychology,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 52, no. 2 (2005): 252.

<sup>172</sup> Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 80.

readers with sufficient information about participants, research process, and context with thick description of participants' experiences for appropriate understanding of the findings. Readers can compare the results of my research with other research studies in different situations and relate the findings to similar situations of their own. Overall, IPA requires rigorous principles of data collection and analysis. I followed all the steps of IPA to maintain the integrity of findings.

## CHAPTER 4

### DESCRIPTIVE TASK: FINDINGS

As the descriptive work, this chapter has two sections. First, I introduce the background of participants, and describe information that is related to the situation of the death of the child as it has been experienced by each bereaved couple and each bereaved parent. Then emergent themes are presented following a large category of super-ordinate themes to explicate how Christian spirituality helped each parent live through the grieving process for the loss of the child. Seven main themes will be presented including *Faith Community as a Source of Support, A Moment of Encountering God, God Gives their Life Meanings, Significant Perspective Changes on Life and Death, Sharing their Stories of Life, Family as the Ground of Sustaining Life, and Remembering the Child.*

#### Situation of the Death of Participants' Child

##### Bereaved Couples

##### *Kang-Soo and Jane*

Kang-Soo is in his early 50's, an engineer, and Jane is in her late 40's. They have lived in the United States more than 30 years. Kang-Soo and Jane were born in Korea, and each of them emigrated from South Korea when they were young. They have been Christians over 30 years, and married for 30 years. They had three sons at short intervals, and they were happy to have one daughter after a long interval following the third son. First son Danny was rated on the top level of the State Test, and Jane was so proud, expecting this smart son would accomplish something great. One day, Jane noticed that Danny's front neck was swollen, and they visited a doctor to check on the cause. That

evening, the doctor called and said Danny had leukemia. The next day, Danny was hospitalized, and treatments were started. At first, Kang-Soo and Jane thought that it would be fine and he would get well soon, but as time passed he got worse.

What made matters worse was, while Danny was hospitalized and being treated with chemotherapy, Kang-Soo and Jane found that their 3-year-old daughter Kay had developed a brain tumor. They had taken Kay to the emergency room because Kay showed symptoms such as headaches and vomiting. After medical examinations, the doctor said that Kay needed immediate surgery to remove a brain tumor. Danny and Kay were hospitalized in the same hospital. For Kang-Soo and Jane, it was unimaginable and unbelievable that two of their adorable children were suddenly diagnosed with cancer at the same time. Kang-Soo was shocked and confused, and Jane experienced a sense of frustration and helplessness. They held on to their faith in God praying for their children's recovery. However, in spite of support and treatment, in 2004 Kay passed away six months after her diagnosis; Danny died three months later at age 12.

#### *Sung-Ho and Eunhee*

Sung-Ho is 50 years old, a doctor of oriental medicine, and Eunhee is 51 years old. They emigrated from South Korea some years after they were married. Sung-Ho and Eunhee were born Christian. When their daughter was 9 years old, they wanted to have one more child, but Eunhee had difficulty becoming pregnant because she had only one ovary. Unexpectedly, Eunhee became pregnant while they were looking for a way to adopt a son. However, the baby boy, Chan-Min became infected with a virus in the hospital right after he was born in 2000. The family and church members prayed for him, and he recovered by a miracle. People called him a miracle baby because he was a

millennium baby who recovered from the virus infection. Everyone from kids to adults in the church liked Chan-Min and liked to hold him because he always looked happy.

In 2001, one day, a friend of Eunhee visited Eunhee's house with her daughter who was same age as Eunhee's daughter and the two visitors stayed overnight. The next day, Sung-Ho, Eunhee, and the friend left early in the morning to go to the church to prepare for a charity bazaar. Eunhee was in charge of making food as the leader of the church women's association. Sung-ho drove the women to church and planned to return immediately back home to take care of the two 10-years-old girls and the sleeping fifteen month Chan-Min. But, help was needed to set up tables and his returning home was delayed. While they were working, their neighbor came to the church. Eunhee thought it was too early for him to come for the bazaar. After talking with him, Sung-Ho left the church with the neighbor, saying that there was a problem with children. He talked to Eunhee as if there was no problem.

However, Eunhee could not concentrate on food preparation; her hands trembled and her body shook with anxiety. Thus, she decided to go back home with her friend. Near her house, they saw many police cars and yellow caution tape had been hung around her house. She wanted to get into her house, but the police asked her to stay at the car until her husband came to her. Finally, Sung-Ho came and explained in a calm voice that Chan-Min had drowned in the swimming pool while the two girls were taking a shower. Eunhee's daughter understood that doors to the swimming pool must be closed because the baby might try to get in the pool. However, she came out of the swimming pool first, and the daughter of Eunhee's friend left the pool some minutes later without noticing she did not close doors. Chan-Min was transferred to a hospital, but it was too late to revive

him.

*Brian and Sharon*

Brian is 39 years old, an associate pastor of a church. He emigrated from South Korea with his family when he was 16 years old. His parents had gone through many hardships to work and raise their children as the first generation of immigrants. Brian has two older brothers. His parents had a daughter who died because of a car accident when she was 12 years old. After the accident, his parents prayed to God to give them a child promising God they will dedicate the child to be used for God's Glory as a pastor. Then, they gave birth to their son Brian. Brian's wife Sharon is 40 years old and works in a Korean bank. She came to the United States with her sister to study. Brian and Sharon met at the bank, and they were married in 2000. Their marriage was going well and they had a baby boy whom they named David. However, Brian developed a serious disease that required major surgery. After getting well, he quit his job and decided to enter theological seminary to become a pastor. His parents supported his decision, but Sharon was worried about their financial situation and being a pastor's wife.

At the time, the baby David was taken care of in a day care center because Sharon worked, and Brian studied during the day and worked at night. About the time Brian finished his first semester, Sharon and Brian noticed pus oozing from David's ears whenever he coughed. When they visited a doctor, he said that it was croup and was not a serious illness. However, symptoms continued for a week although the prescribed medicine was taken. They revisited the hospital, and David was hospitalized for doctors' observation and treatment. His condition continued to get worse without any specific diagnosis, and he was transferred from a general ward to ICU. Sharon stayed in the



hospital with David all night and went to work every morning. This pattern was repeated for 45 days. When David's condition was a little better, the hospital released him, and finally David came back home. However, he was not completely recovered. About a month later, Brian and Sharon noticed that David had a serious problem with his breathing. They called 9-1-1. By the time they arrived at the hospital, a doctor pronounced David dead.

### Individual Bereaved Parents

#### *Jisook*

Jisook is a 60-year-old married woman. Jisook was a mathematics teacher when she was in South Korea. She emigrated from South Korea with her husband and two children 18 years ago because of her husband's business. Jisook was proud of her teaching job, and she was about to be promoted to be a vice principal. Their first son Sam and his younger sister were taken care of by grandmother, Jisook's mom, when Jisook worked in Korea. Jisook reluctantly came to the United States and always thought she would return to Korea when her children were old enough to attend college. After immigration, Jisook had a hard time becoming familiar with her new life in the United States. Particularly, it was hard to learn English because she came to the US when she was already 42 years old. However, a woman invited her to a church and provided her with guidelines about how to live in the US and how to find a job. The woman persuaded her to join Bible study and the leadership program at the church. Jisook and her husband became Christians. In fact, when they were in Korea, neither had gone to church even though on both sides their parents were influential lay leaders of their churches who had encouraged them many times to go to church.

On the other hand, Sam enjoyed American school life, adjusting well to his new circumstances in the United States. Sam was a very nice boy. He did not cause any problems, not even when going through the age of puberty. Sam was admitted in a top rated university after only three years of study in the US. During the first summer vacation, he even got a part time job working at a company in Silicon Valley. Jisook was happy and proud of him. During the time he was working in the company, Jisook received a call from Sam. He said he had hurt his arm while playing baseball with friends. The X-ray exam found nothing wrong with his arm, but after many days the pain had not abated. He visited a doctor of oriental medicine for treatment, but the doctor recommended that Sam visit a hospital, because the doctor thought his oriental treatment would not work for Sam. At the hospital, Sam was told he needed surgery to remove the inflammation from his arm. The surgery went well, but the doctor found the lymphoma from the biopsy result. At first, the doctor guaranteed that the prognosis of lymphoma was not serious and Sam could return to school for the next semester. However, the cancer cells were aggressive, and his condition became worse. He was transferred to another hospital near home in November, and he died in December of 2000.

#### *Doo-Hwan*

Doo-Hwan is 65 years old. He emigrated from South Korea with his wife 35 years ago. He was born Christian, but he liked to live in ways opposed to Christian teaching. From the time he was in middle school in Korea, Doo-Hwan liked to hang around with hooligan boys drinking and smoking. Then he joined in a group of scamps when he was a college student. However, he tried to break away from his rough life when he was dismissed from three years of Korean military service and married. Then he and his wife

came to the US. He worked hard managing his own business, and within three years he was able to establish a small company. They bought a house and gave birth of two daughters. Their life seemed to be stable and successful. Then, Doo-Hwan's old habits came back. He drank beer and whisky every day, and invited friends to his house every week for drinking, singing songs, telling lewd jokes and watching dirty movies. Because he was a born Christian, he went to church from time to time. But when he met young adult members in the church, he invited them his house and did the same things with them.

Time went by that way. One day, an unexpected tragedy happened to him. He loved his second daughter Lisa very much and did everything for her. As soon as Lisa obtained her driver's license, Doo-Hwan bought a luxury car for her. When she needed money, he gave her whatever amount she needed. Lisa prepared dinner for Doo-Hwan every day because her mom worked in the evenings. One day, Doo-Hwan received a call from Lisa at 4:30 pm. She asked if he could come home early because she needed to go out. He said that he could come home at 5:30. After some minutes, he was reminded of a commitment to stop at his friend's store opening celebration. Then, he called Lisa, but she did not answer the phone. He left a message. However, he felt it was strange that she did not respond to his call and thought that he had better go directly home. When he arrived at home, he noticed that front door was not locked. He called out to Lisa, but she did not answer. He found Lisa lying on her face on the floor. He was horrified to find her hands and feet tied up together behind her. When he saw her face, he realized that Lisa was dead and her blood was spilling on the floor. He was extremely shocked and could not deal with this, and he called his neighbors. They were also shocked and stunned.

They quickly called 9-1-1. Lisa had been murdered by two young men who came to steal money from her house. Later, it was proved that it was an act of deliberate and premeditated violence by two gang members who planned the crime with Lisa's friend. They had driven the friend's car to make Lisa feel she could trust them. They were captured five years later, and they were sentenced to death after the court trial.

### *Yuna*

Yuna is a 55-year-old divorced woman who has just retired from working in the office of her church dealing with administrative affairs. She graduated from a theological seminary. She became a Christian led by her sister when she emigrated from South Korea 15 years ago. Her son Tae-Min came to the US with the family of Yuna's sister two years earlier than Yuna did. Tae-Min lived happily with a positive attitude, making others laugh with a joke, and he was smart enough to get high marks from his SAT. He was accepted by several universities. Yuna wanted him to accept the Harvard admission, but he did not want the high pressure of competing with other students at Harvard. Instead, he selected another university that offered him a full scholarship and a stipend. Yuna was disappointed by his decision not to go to Harvard, and she talked to him about that all the time.

It was one day in the morning three days before Tae-Min's high school graduation. While he was sleeping at home after coming back from a sleepover at school, Yuna went out to help her sister who managed a dry cleaning and drop shop. When she came back home, he was not there. While she was searching for him, she received a call from her sister saying that Tae-Min was in her shop. So, Yuna came by again to pick him up to get his hair cut. On the way, he said that he did not want to have a hair cut in his mom's

favorite place. Instead, he wanted his hair cut by his aunt. So they came back again to Yuna's sister. Yuna was angry about coming back and forth from home to sister's shop three times and talked to him about the school issue again. On the way back to the shop, she got a call from Tae-Min's friend who wanted to speak with Tae-Min. The friend asked him to go a beach. Yuna tried to persuade him against going to the beach because he seemed tired and needed sleep and food. However, Tae-Min asked her to understand him that he wanted to hang around with his friends before his graduation. She could not help allowing him to go.

After having the hair cut, his friends came to pick him up, and Yuna came back home. While Yuna was cleaning the house, she received a call from the pastor of her church. He tried to explain something about Tae-Min, but it was unclear what he was talking about. It sounded like Tae-Min's friend had drowned and Tae-Min had helped him. The pastor said that he was going to the beach and asked her to come too. She felt something was wrong and became extremely anxious. She was unable to drive, and the husband of her sister came to take her there. On the way, she received a call from the pastor again. He said that he had arrived and Tae-Min was okay. But, Yuna felt Tae-Min would not be okay. She could sense that the pastor was hiding something and trying to comfort her. When she arrived at the beach, she saw her son lying on the beach and that he wasn't breathing. The pastor explained that Tae-Min jumped into water to save his drowning friend. His friend had survived, but Tae-Min did not.

In sum, I described background information of three participant couples and three individual participants and situations of the death of the child. As a guide for reading the data analysis, the following table provides pseudonymous names of participants and their

children and information related to the death.

	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Name of Child</b>	<b>Age of Death</b>	<b>Cause of Death</b>	<b>Years Since Death</b>
<b>Bereaved Couples</b>	<i>Kang-Soo; Jane</i>	Danny; Kay	12, 3	brain tumor; leukemia	12; 12
	<i>Sung-Ho; Eunhee</i>	Chan-Min	13 month	drowning at a swimming pool	13
	<i>Brian; Sharon</i>	<i>David</i>	2	respiratory problem	11
<b>Individual Bereaved Parents</b>	<i>Jisook</i>	Sam	20	thyroid cancer	14
	<i>Doo-Hwan</i>	Lisa	18	murder	15
	<i>Yuna</i>	Tae-Min	18	drowning at a beach	8

Table. Information of Participant

### Themes

The super-ordinate themes were derived from a rigorous process involving both the within-case analysis and across-cases analysis. Patterns within and connections between emergent themes were explored to delineate how participants interpret their experiences in their narratives so as to categorize them into super-ordinate themes. The purpose of the analyses was to understand participants' experiences and explicate the role of Christian spirituality during their grieving process. The description of participants' experiences was interpreted by the researcher to see what various elements of Christian spirituality influenced them in coping with the loss of a child. Sub-themes were

categorized under each super-ordinate theme to explain the details of the main themes.

The seven super-ordinate themes involve; *Faith Community as a Source of Support, A Moment of Encountering God, God Gives their Life Meaning, Significant Perspective Changes on Life and Death, Sharing their Stories of life, Family as the Ground of Sustaining Life, and Remembering the Child.*

### Faith Community as a Source of Support

The first super-ordinate theme from the analysis was *Faith Community as a Source of Support*. Almost every interviewee acknowledged help from their faith communities. Support from pastors and members of the church was important in order for the parents to feel secure and safe, particularly right after the loss. Members of the community provided them with food and care and prayers and offered comfort by being with them. Visiting hospitals and attending funeral services were also acts that comforted the interviewees. They were grateful for those gestures of support. In addition, some interviewees actively engaged in church activities after the loss of a child, which helped them to recover from their grief. However, interviewees also indicated unhelpful support that hurt their feelings. This first theme includes *Prayers and Supports, Continuous Participation in Worship and Activities, Funeral Service, and Inappropriate Words.*

#### *Prayers and Supports*

Interviewees disclosed different kinds of help from their faith community. In particular, they appreciated prayers as demonstrating a deep concern for them. Some of them indicated that being a Christian itself was helpful because they knew they would be provided with prayers from members of the church. When Doo-Hwan's daughter Lisa was murdered, he did not belong to any church. After the tragic event, he received a call

from the pastor of a nearby church. He wanted to come by to pray for Doo-Hwan and his family. Doo-Hwan was about to say no, but he felt that prayer would be helpful for his family and allowed the pastor to come to his home. When the pastor and three other pastors arrived at his house, the crime scene had not yet been cleared.

*When the pastor came to my house with three other pastors, the floor was stained with blood and the stink of the blood still in the living room. I just covered it with large towels. I saw the pastor praying for me while Lisa was lying flat on the floor. I felt thankful.*

After the funeral service, Doo-Hwan visited church after church to speak about his gratitude. When he visited the church of the pastor who had visited him, a member who did representative prayer prayed for Lisa. He was touched and the pastor's message was comforting to him. So, he and his wife decided to go to church every Sunday. Similarly, Jisook had begun to go to her church one year before her son Sam was diagnosed with lymphoma. Her pastor and church members came to the hospital that was located in another State. They prayed for her and her son and put some Bible messages on the wall of the room to encourage them. In addition, church members planned a donation program to provide them with financial support. When her son was transferred to the hospital near home, more members visited her to pray for her son.

*At the time, I was just involved in the church. The pastor even came to San Francisco with the member who guided my American life and had led me to the church. They prayed for me and my son and comforted me. And, all the church members participated in the "Love Mileage program" that was designed to support my family financially. I was given a large card on which the members wrote encouraging messages with a gift of money. There were even some names that I did not recognize. How much love we received from them! Where did this love come from? That moved me to have faith in God.*

Jisook thought that members' visits and prayers were an expression of their love and concern. Prayer support was greatly needed when the child was still alive and in the



hospital. Interviewees prayed for their child hoping desperately that the child would recover. Another couple, Kang-Soo and Jane, also appreciated their members' prayers for their children. Kang-Soo was reminded of a happening. "Some members came close to my house without knocking on the door and prayed for us and then they were gone because they knew that we were extremely tired. I heard that later. It was so comforting to me."

In addition, church members provided them with what they needed. When interviewees were in the hospital to be with the sick child, it was hard to take care of spouse and other children at home. At the time, Kang-Soo and Jane were provided with care and food by their church members. Jane said, "When my children were sick and during the aftermath, many church members visited, helped, and provided food. Pastors came to pray, taking regular turns. Looking back at the time, the community was tremendously helpful to me." However, Jane went on say that she prayed with hope for recovery when her children were in the hospital. When Jane lost two children, nothing could help her because she felt a deep sense of resentment and betrayal. She did not want to see anyone or listen to any Bible message. Her grief was so deep that no one was able to touch her heart. In that situation, she received help from a member of the church in a relational perspective rather a religious aspect of care.

*It lasted after my child died for a while. I am reminded of a woman who was sincere in her faith in God. I was in a mood that I rejected religious help. It was not religious help. How can I express it? Relational? Affection? I had that kind of contact. The woman visited my home and asked me to walk with her. When we walked together she talked to me. I don't remember exactly what she said, but it was enough to console my broken heart. That was helpful. That really was.*

In other words, being provided with prayers and Bible messages were definitely helpful, but the bereaved parents also needed a relational approach to feel an affectionate touch. It

was also an important source of support from members of the faith community. Sharon appreciated visitors being with her, crying with her, and grieving with her. She said that she does not remember persons who talked about religious beliefs and comforts. However, Sharon indicated, “Visitors who held my hands and cried for me without saying anything, I remembered them. They tried to feel my grief as theirs, and that was so encouraging.”

#### *Continuous Participation in Worship and Activities*

After receiving support from the faith community when they were in the hospital, some interviewees actively participated in church activities such as Bible study, volunteer services, and leadership programs. While they were engaged in these activities, they gained vitality in their lives. Jisook said, “I intentionally participated in every activity that the church held, which enabled me to become one body with the church like family. That helped me to be healed.” Similarly, Doo-Hwan was also vitalized by participating in church activities and attending all worship services including Sunday, Wednesday evening, Friday evening, and every day early morning service. His pastor encouraged him to be a leader of the church by participating in the leadership programs. Doo-Hwan felt that his faith began to grow and his wounded heart became healed.

Likewise, participating in church activities and attending worship services were the basis for interviewees to work through their grief. However, it was hard for some interviewees to attend the worship service right after death of a child. Eunhee’s son Chan-Min died on Saturday. She could not decide whether to go to the church on Sunday. It was not because her faith in God was shaken, but because she was afraid and anxious about being looked at by people.

*I knew that I had to attend Sunday worship service. It was very next day after my son’s death. If I went to the church and sat in a pew, I would be likely to feel*

*people talk behind me. I was so afraid they would blame me for being there right after the passing away of my child. I felt they saw me as a crazy about the church.*

Even though Eunhee felt afraid of being blamed, she kept going to church and attending worship service because she believed that meeting with God in the worship service could sustain her. Her church members and pastors were supportive, but she believed that human support was limited. Of course, Eunhee appreciated church members' support such as praying for her, providing food, washing dishes, holding her hands, and soothing her feelings. On the other side, she heard that people were talking behind that she left her son because she was crazy about church. She found it difficult to go outside. It was a kind of test for her to go to a market and the church. However, there was a clear reason for her to keep going to the church.

*In fact, I was unable to hear pastor's message in worship service for a while. However, because I heard the voice of God, I was there in the worship service to meet God and hold onto God. From my experience, it would be hard to get through grief if I did not feel God's presence in me through worship. It was helpful to be provided support from members of my church, but that was not enough to overcome the pain of grief.*

Jane felt hopeless and fell into a depression after her children died. She blamed God, asking God how God could do that to her. She was proud of being a Christian living faithfully in God. She felt that anything related to faith in God she would like to throw out the window. However, she said, "I wanted to give up my faith in God. I felt I did not need anything about faith and salvation. But, I encountered some moments in which God comforted me when I kept going to the church." Jane indicated that continuing her relationship with God in the worship was the first important factor in getting through her grief. In the midst of hopelessness and helplessness, some interviewees believed that holding onto God and God's Words was the best support along with actual help from

members of their church.

### *Funeral Service*

Some interviewees mentioned that they felt something special from the funeral service. In particular, the place and circumstance of the service was comforting to them. Eunhee did not remember how the funeral service was conducted because she was emotionally troubled with her grief at the time. One day, when she watched the video tape of the funeral, she was touched and received much comfort looking back at the funeral service. So many people attended the funeral service even though it was a funeral for a baby. There was no empty seat and people were even crowded outside. Her pastor created a poem for her and her family, and her friend, who was an announcer for a broadcasting station, came from another State and recited the poem for her.

For Jisook, the funeral service was meaningful. The service was conducted in the main sanctuary of her church. At the time, it was the church's first time to have a funeral service in the main sanctuary. Before a new pastor was appointed to the church some years ago, conducting a funeral service in the main sanctuary was not allowed for members of the church, but the pastor changed the policy. For her, it was a beautiful service in the sacred sanctuary. In addition, it was Christmas season, so that Christmas trees and ornaments decorated the sanctuary.

*I was so grateful. As I said, it was not long after I attended the church and my son was gone to his school in another State at the time. He had never attended the church, and my daughter began to participate in the youth group. I felt like I was treated as a VIP. I received a warm hospitality from the church. The capacity of the main sanctuary was about 1,200 people, and it was full of church members. Moreover, it was decorated beautifully for Christmas. Stars were blinking all around the sanctuary. I felt good for my son. The service was peaceful and sacred. I felt that my son would be in peace in Heaven when he saw this beautiful service for him.*

On the other hand, Jane was comforted by the process of designing the funeral service. After the loss of her child, her church pastor came by her house and said he came to design a funeral service with her. Then, he asked Jane about the deceased child's favorite hymn, the Bible verses, and so forth. She understood that the purpose of his visiting was not only to obtain information but also to try to comfort her by revisiting her after the loss. "Maybe he intentionally asked about these things in order to make me participate in designing the funeral service because the pastor already knew the child's favorite song. That was helpful and gave me strength at the time."

Regarding the funeral service, first of all, interviewees thought that the more people who attended the funeral service, the more they felt they were receiving concern and love from their faith community. That was the reason Brian and Sharon did not feel that their church was supportive. At the time, Brian served at a small church where there were fewer than twenty members. Not only in regard to the funeral but also the members' support, they felt they did not receive anything from their church when their child died. In addition, the funeral held in a sacred place and specially designed for interviewees was enough to touch them with peace and comfort.

#### *Inappropriate Words*

However, not every support was helpful. Sometimes, people around interviewees hurt their feeling by saying something inappropriate. Interviewees indicated that comfort came from being with them, not from speaking words to try to console them. Some comforting words were not acceptable even though those people intended to extend their condolences, not to hurt them. These words included think about something to repent; God only allows pain that you are able to handle; the pain is a blessing from God; the

pain is a test to grow in faith and more words like that. The interviewees acknowledged that people who spoke inappropriate words to them did not know what else to say, but still people need to be careful when they speak God-related talk. Inappropriate words hurt the bereaved parents who are in a grieving process.

For Eunhee, one of the words that hurt her was that she needed to check herself if there was anything for which she needed to repent before God.

*While church members helped me a lot, they also hurt me. There were people like Job's friends. Thus, I thought that people needed to be careful when they tried to comfort bereaved person. When I heard that we had to look back to find something to repent of before God, I was so mad at them. I did not understand why people came and spoke such inappropriate words to me. Did they think it would comfort me? I was already too tired before they added those words to my burden. Think of something to repent? Although they did not say such things, bereaved parents could not help themselves thinking guilty thoughts about what they had done wrong for the dead child. Every bereaved parent would think why has that happened to me -- and look back over their past life.*

For Jane, one of the most hurting words was "God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able."

*When I was so tired. Then a pastor came and gave me these words: there was nothing I would suffer that was unbearable because God allows people only what they are able to overcome. That made my heart to fill with anger. Then I wanted to speak to him, 'Then, you do it! If you think you are able, stand in my position!' So, I think there are words and times to speak and not speak. But, I understood that the words they spoke were because they did not know what to say to bereaved parents. Thankfully, as time passed, I thought that their words were right for me. I accepted the words later. But, I wanted to punch him at the time (laughter).*

Doo-Hwan mentioned many times that he was able to get out of the nightmare entirely because of help from the pastor and church members. He confessed that it was God's grace toward him. However, Doo-Hwan became angry when some members spoke something inappropriate.

*What some members said to me, "You've got hit!" Or "God struck you down!" That put fire into my blood. When I heard those words, I wanted to heap abuses on*

*them. Some others spoke to me that God would give you many blessings. But that did not work for me. In this painful event, what kind of benefits I would like to get? I just lost my adorable daughter in pain. What blessings did I need? That did not make any sense to me. I thought like that. Later, when I was transformed by the grace of God, I realized that God really gave me blessings.*

Kang-Soo also experienced a situation that a pastor spoke inappropriate words to him when his child was in the hospital for chemotherapy. At the time, Kang-Soo and Jane prayed for recovery with hope, and Jane asked pastors to visit and pray for their child. One of the pastors visited them. They heard that the pastor had the gift of prophecy, and the pastor was able to hear the voice of God during his prayer. However, Kang-Soo was hurt by the pastor's prayer, and it was not acceptable.

*The pastor said that the pain, my children's diseases were caused by me, and it was God's will that God wanted me to pray more. When I heard it, I was okay. But, I thought more and more about his words. Then, I realized that I did not believe in God in the way the pastor believed. It's very hard to accept God who is intentionally giving pain.*

Soon after the loss and during time in the hospital, interviewees heard those inappropriate words. Kang-Soo wondered why people spoke about God's will in the midst of a painful situation. He concluded that it was because they did not have any proper words to speak in that situation. Kang-Soo said, "That was not their experience. They did not know about being a parent of a dying child. They would want to speak about words from their faith in God, but they did not have anything to say for that situation." He went on to say that "It would be better to speak nothing for me." Kang-Soo indicated that it is important for those who are in a painful situation to avoid trying to give meaning to their experiences thoughtlessly. The spiritual meaning of their experience will be found by themselves, and it should not be given to them by others. Yuna also experienced the same thing as Kang-Soo did. Yuna received much support from her church members, particularly those who

were there with her in silence. However, sometimes she met members who tried to explain the reason for his son Tae-Min's death, which she regarded it as unhelpful. Speaking about God's will was never helpful in the situation. Silence would be better than trying to speak about something so personal. In addition, Yuna was reminded of a timely improper support.

*One day after my son died. Well, I don't remember the exact day when he visited me. You know. I lost my memories intermittently at the time. Anyway, it was one or two days after the accident. At the time, I was out of my mind. The person came by my home and said that I needed to prepare for my life to live without my son. Oh! My God! It was just few days after my son died. What the! What was he talking about! Even I was not ready to accept my son's death.*

When Brian lost his son, particularly pastors hurt his feeling by speaking about God's will. They might have assumed that it was pastors' talk between pastors. So they thought that Brian, a pastor, would accept their words. One of the words Brian remembered was that "God will use you greatly because you were able to get through this pain." When Brian heard these kinds of words from pastors, he felt like punching them. He also mentioned the accident of the ferry Sewol that caused the deaths of 300 teenagers on April 16, 2014. The bereaved parents asked the Korean government to explain why the government did not attempt to save the students' lives when they had enough time to do it. Five months after the tragic accident the bereaved parents' demonstration continued with no responsible acts and explanations from the government. While some people encouraged the bereaved parents, some others said to them, "That's enough," "Stop the demonstration," and "I don't want to see their crying anymore." As a bereaved parent, Brian believes that bereaved parents need someone who can be with them, crying for them, and speaking for them so that bereaved parents are able to vent their feeling of anger. Culturally, Koreans tend to repress their emotions, but they need to express them.



In sum, inappropriate approaches from people to interviewees were to speak some words that tried to make sense of the death of a child without thoughtful consideration of the parents' feelings and situation. That was because they have never had the same experience and did not know any appropriate words to speak in times of the death of a child.

#### A Moment of Encountering with God

Most interviewees were unable to live normal lives in the first several years after the death. The length of the time depended on their situation, but they were in the darkest time at least for two years. Throughout the time, they felt anger, hopelessness, regret, guilt and thoughts of suicide. Spiritually, they were unable to pray and read the Bible, because they were blaming God. However, at some point, they had an opportunity to begin healing. That happened by chance when they experienced something spiritual at some later moment. Some realized God's love through God's only son Jesus Christ. The others had an encounter with God at the end of their search for the meaning of the death of a child.

#### *A Transcendental Experience*

Some interviewees experienced God's presence with them. For some it was a super-natural experience or spiritual moment when they seemed to hear the voice of God and to feel God's presence around them. After the losses of her children, Jane was depressed and resentful toward God. One day, Jane heard the voice of God inside her. "Be faithful! Your children are now in Heaven." The voice was so clear that she felt compelled to accept the message, and she decided to live faithfully in God so that she would meet with her children in heaven. From that time on, Jane has read the Bible which

has given her much comfort. She said that moment was the beginning point of her healing.

*So, what I thought was that if I live with faith in God, I will be reunited with my children because the voice said that my children are in heaven. For me, the way to go to Heaven is to live faithfully. From that time on, I started to spend quiet time with the Bible. I have wrestled with the Word of God. I started reading the Bible to help me to live faithfully so that I will be reunited with my children. However, I felt comforted and healed while I continued to read the Bible.*

At the moment Jane heard God's voice, she felt something sacred and warm air surrounded her as if God comforted her. Jane cried and repented for complaining to God. After a while, she had another moment in which she felt that God spoke her, "Put your burden down," showing her a vision that she was carrying a burden on her shoulder. Then, Jane tried to put down the burden of her deceased children. For Jane, the experiences of meeting God in the voices brought about an opportunity to be healed and to live sincerely in her faith in God.

Eunhee also experienced hearing God's voice early in the morning when she and her husband went to the church for early morning worship service. It was about the time of sun rise. The sky became bright with red color. She prayed in the car with tears and asking God, "Why did you take my son Chan-Min? Why did you make that choice? Why didn't you take me instead of Chan-Min?" That was not a prayer, it was rather crying out to God from inside her heart. At that moment, she heard a clear and strong voice from somewhere.

*Suddenly, I heard a voice. "Eunhee! I love you so much." At the moment, everything that I could not understand rationally was made understandable by the voice. I felt that the spiritual touch from God allowed me to make sense of things that could not be grasped in human thoughts and knowledge. My tears gushed out, and I could understand what I did not understand. That was an unquestionable and undeniable touch from God. I was assured that Chan-Min was given from God and God will take care of Chan-Min in Heaven better than I did.*

The spiritual moment that Jane and Eunhee related to the voice of God gave them

assurance that their children will be taken care by God in Heaven. They looked upon this transcendental experience as an experience of the Holy Spirit. It was an unexplainable experience. Jane mentioned that people might think I was insane if I talked about my experience of hearing God's voice. However, they both had confidence that the experience was a point of healing to help them get through their loss of the child.

For Doo-Hwan, after the loss of his daughter in such a horrible way he began smoking and drinking every day although he also began to go to church. Every night, he came home, drunk and noisy. His rage increased. He attempted to kill himself and his wife and to set fire to his house. Fortunately, his efforts failed. When he was driving, he intentionally tried to pick quarrels with anyone. When he saw a happy family, he wanted to kill that family. These thought and acts came from his rage against the criminals and his miserable life. He spent six months like that. One day, his wife asked him to participate in a spiritual retreat that was to be held for three days in the retreat center of the church. Doo-Hwan thought that he would see Lisa if he prayed sincerely to God. So, he decided to participate in the retreat. He prayed to God. "God, please show me my daughter in heaven. Then, I will quit smoking and drinking, and live my life for You." However, he did not see anything.

Doo-Hwan was so disappointed in God. He wanted to go back home immediately to begin again drinking and smoking. Before reaching home, he visited Lisa in the cemetery. Back home, he drank one shot of whisky, and suddenly he felt strong pain on his teeth. He lit a cigarette, but it caused nausea. He tried it again and again, but he was unable to smoke that night. The next day, the same thing happened to him. When he came to his work place, he tried it again. He felt something in him had changed. He called his

pastor and explained this odd experience. Then, the pastor prayed for him over the phone. Doo-Hwan burst into tears and felt that God touched him and comforted him. After that, he threw away his cigarettes and whiskey. Instead he placed Bibles everywhere his hands reached.

The transcendental experience of encountering God helped the bereaved parents as a spiritual awakening moment. Whether it came from the voice of God or an unexplainable moment, it happened to them all of a sudden. They believed that God allowed them to experience the spiritual moment when they were in unbearable pain so that they would live in the faith of God with the confidence that God would take loving care of their child in heaven.

#### *God Is also a Bereaved Parent*

Some interviewees experienced a moment when they were reminded that God was also a bereaved parent. They understood God's pain in letting God's only child Jesus suffer on the Cross. From the realization of God's love they were comforted, knowing they were feeling the same pain God had felt.

Jane was not comforted when she read a story written by a bereaved parent who lost one child because Jane lost two children in the same year. Jane thought that she would be comforted if she met a bereaved parent who had lost at least two children. She thought that God's pain after losing a son would not be as severe as the pain she had gone through. However, one day when Jane was reading the Bible, she stopped reading at a point.

*When I read the Bible, I stopped reading at John 3:16. For God so loved the world he gave his only son. Only son, only son, I repeated the words only son and meditate on the words. I heard a voice of God from my inside. God said, "I gave you everything, but you still have a half." At the moment, I was awakened by the*

*voice. Do I have a half? Until that time, I have demanded God an explanation of my losses saying, "You lost only one child, but I lost two children. How could you do that to me!" However, when I heard the voice that God gave me all that God had, I realized that I have two other surviving children.*

When she realized God's great love for her, all her complaints toward God were eliminated, and she decided to live enthusiastically for her surviving children. Sharon experienced a similar moment when she meditated on God who had lost a son. She had never profoundly contemplated salvation before the loss of her son because she thought that she would be saved by believing in God and Jesus. While Sharon was meditating on God, Jesus, and salvation, she perceived that salvation came from God's love and the grace that God had let God's son die for us. Sharon felt God's pain from the loss of God's son.

*God loved me so much. God gave me the thought after my son died. I thought of God's pain when God's son was crucified on the Cross. I asked God, "God, have You felt the same pain I felt?" "How much pain did you feel?" I knew that God was in deep pain when God lost God's son because I was in so much pain when I lost my baby son.*

For Sharon, God was also a bereaved parent. In that moment, her son was identified with Jesus, her feeling of pain became one with God's pain, and she realized God's great love and grace toward the world and herself. This moment of perceiving God's love led Sharon to think about salvation and heaven where her son had been taken. Then she was confident about meeting her son in heaven.

On the other hand, Yuna could not find any answer from current religious teaching in her church. She started reading books written by famous spiritual thinkers including Henri Nouwen, Thomas Merton, and Teresa of Avila. Yuna believed that these spiritual leaders experienced losses of loved ones and knew about the pain of life. In particular, Yuna was an admirer of life. She was captured by the interpretation of the story

about his brother who died in the World War II. Just as Jesus suffered from thirst, his brother was wounded and died from dehydration. In that point, Yuna was moved to feel Jesus' pain.

*Reading the part, I felt like I was in the place where Jesus was crucified 2,000 years ago. My heart was full of pain because of Jesus' pain. I cried for two days because I grieved for Jesus. I realized that all the knowledge I had about Jesus at that time was just knowledge. I began to love Jesus rather than know Jesus. I felt from my heart that Jesus really loved human beings very much. He is the man I can love with all my heart. At that moment I felt I became a real Christian.*

These three bereaved parents who identified God with a bereaved parent had each lost their son. They were easily able to feel the pain of God as the same pain they suffered as bereaved parents. In particular, because Yuna's son died when he tried to save his friend from drowning, Jesus' death to save people's lives has profound meaning for her.

#### *Making a Choice in Searching for Meaning*

It was inevitable that interviewees would search to find meaning in the loss of their child. A spiritual moment was experienced by them when they asked God about the meaning of the loss. While some interviewees experienced a moment of encountering God through a voice, other bereaved parents realized God's love and grace from Jesus' death. However, in the end of their search for meaning, some parents simply had to make a decision to accept the loss. This moment of choice can also be understood as a sacred moment when one perceives God as the creator and the Lord of the Universe. Then, the bereaved found the grace to accept God's dominance.

Asking God for the reason, Kang-Soo had tried to find out why his children had to die from cancer, but there was no answer. He had to make a decision whether to have faith in God or to turn from God.

*In one point, I had to make a decision because I did not get any answer from God.*

*I tried to find the answer by reading the Bible and praying to God. That was useless. I tried to solve the problem, but even today I don't know why my children had to die. Why did they suffer from that disease? There were some religious questions. However, I had to make a choice at a certain point because there was no answer no matter how I tried to find it. So, "Now what?" Only one thing was sure: I had to live my life. Then, the decision I had to make was whether I live in a world where God is or another world where God does not exist. For me, it was better living in a world where God rules. I just made the determination to trust God.*

His decision-making helped him calm down inside himself and be in peace. Kang-Soo thought that he can ask the reason why when he meets God in heaven. Kang-Soo was reminded of the end of Job's story.

*In fact, God did not answer Job. God just said, "I am God. I have authority to do that." After I admit the fact that human beings cannot ask that kind of question of God, then what is left? Okay, then, how should I live this life? There is only option: either I accept or reject being an atheist. I had to accept God. God is my God. God is creator and I am created. When I accepted the fact, I could accept everything. Only one hope is that I will ask God the reason when I go to heaven.*

Initially, after the loss of his baby son, Brian searched for the meaning of death and his life. On one hand, Brian thought that he had good reason to leave God because he had been betrayed by God. He wanted to lead his life to the edge of the worst. Because God had provided the cause, he thought that God also gave him the indulgence. However, Brian kept searching for the meaning by reading books. While reading books, he encountered the moment at which he had to make a choice.

*Reading books was helpful for me in getting through my grief. While I was reading books, I found some messages that God gave me. I was compared to a violinist who was playing violin alone in Carnegie Hall. Heavenly creatures were watching my playing. God wanted me to finish playing, and Satan wanted me to give it up. However, it was a situation no one could help me finish. God asked me, "Can you play for me?" The message captured me. I had to make a choice whether I gave up my life, playing violin and live like a prodigal son or I took that message as the basis of my life. I selected the message God gave me and decided to live my life sincerely in God.*

Brian tried to live faithfully in God as a pastor. However, his question still remained

unanswered. One day, he found a message that caused his question about the meaning of his life and his son's death to be wiped out all at once.

*At the time, the message God gave me was "I am the Lord of the universe." That was given to Job. "Brace yourself like a man. I will question you and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand" (Job 38: 3-4).*

Brian could not answer the question God asked him. After the moment of realization, he stopped asking why. He changed the focus of his question from "What is the meaning of the pain God allowed?" to "How do we advance our lives forward?"

For Jisook, there was an unsolved problem. Shortly after her loss, she was encouraged by her church members to read Job. While she read Job, she understood that God gave her lessons and blessings from her experience. However, she wondered why God gave her son such severe pain and death just as he had done to Job's children. God recovered Job, and she believed that God will restore her and her family, but the answer about his son was still unresolved.

*However, how about my son? Why did this child die? Was it because God had a plan for us? I understood that God wanted us to have faith in God and God will bless our lives. Yes, I will live my life as God wanted me to practice God's love in my life. I can do that for sure. But, what about my son? That is a question that still I have.*

Jisook concluded that the question was beyond her control. She said, "I will demand of God an explanation for death of my child when I go to heaven." She indicated that no one can answer the question." She just had to accept the working of God.

*From my understanding, human beings cannot perceive what God is doing. I have only a limited ability to understand God. My time is different from God's time. I made the decision to accept everything God has done, even if I cannot understand. I can ask God about things that I did not understand later when I meet God. Now, I just live my life faithfully in God. I concluded it like this.*

In the end, Jisook concluded that humans cannot grasp the greater will of God. Because



God is beyond human thoughts and knowledge. What she can do in her life is to accept God and ask later. All interviewees who were searching for meaning of their pain and the death of their child made a conclusion that there was no answer. They decided to accept the will of God and live in it. The moment that they made the decision and accepted God was also a spiritual moment that came from meditating on Job or on messages given from God.

### God Gives Their Lives Meaning

Although interviewees were unable to find answers by asking God the question about the loss of their child, they tried to give meaning to their lives by themselves. Throughout their grieving process or in the time immediately after their loss, interviewees realized an important point. They found *God who prepared them for their lives, God's purpose and will, and reconfirmation of their mission*. These sub-themes will be unfolded under this paper's third super-ordinate theme *God Gives Their Lives Meaning*. Some interviewees believed that God prepared a way for them to minimize the shock and help them through their grief. Some accepted the loss of a child as God's will and purpose in order that they themselves would repent of something or have more faith in God, and some others understood that healing was a process that would teach them to reconfirm their missions that were already given from God.

### *God who Prepares for Them*

At the time of loss of his son, Brian was confused about how to accept the loss, but he thought that God had already prepared him in a sense. Looking back over his past life, he was reminded of some important events; his mother's promise to dedicate him to God, a spiritual moment of meeting God when he was 18 years old, a job, marriage, and

dedication to be a pastor, entering theological school, and the loss of his son. Then, Brian thought he would have been even more shocked and unable to handle the situation if he had not entered theological school before his son's death.

*For this unexpected situation I think God prepared me in some aspect. If I had lost my son when I was not following God obediently, the loss would have given me a greater shock. Before I lost my son, it was like God pushed me into a corner so that I surrendered to God. Probably, God led me to the path as a preparation for me.*

Jisook also thought about God's preparation of her. She lost her son not long before she went to church. Jisook confessed that she would have been unable to cope with the situation if she had not gone to church at the time because Jisook was supported by the pastor and members in various ways. In addition, Jisook's family did not have any medical insurance. Jisook thought God's preparation for her extended to medical insurance because Sam was covered by his part-time job he had just stepped in.

*Passing through the time, I have always thought that God prepared me. Many people tried to lead me to church when I was in Korea. My parents even forced me to go to church, but I refused. Without God's leading and preparation, how could I go to church? I believe that God prepared everything for me.*

In a different sense, Eunhee thought of her son's death as God's considerate selection. When Eunhee cried out asking God for the reason why God took her son saying, "Take me instead," she realized one important reason when hearing God's voice, "I love you so much."

*If it was an unavoidable situation that God had to choose one of my family members to die, I think that was God's best choice. If God took my daughter who shared more memories with me, it would be harder for me to cope with the loss. If God took my husband, I would have more difficult time to grieve for him. So God loved me and selected Chan-Min who was only 15-month-old baby at the time. I came across that thought. That was God's best consideration for me.*

For Eunhee, this interpretation led her to think that there was nothing she could call

“mine.” Everything is in God’s hands, and she just follows God’s will. This was their faith: that God led the bereaved parents to a right path and prepared them for the event, and that process gave their faithful lives meaning at the same time.

### *God’s Purpose and Will*

Doo-Hwan thought about the meaning of his daughter’s death. He concluded that it was God’s will to make him repent of his dissipated life and turn to faith in God by allowing him to lose the child he valued most. When Doo-Hwan heard from others that “God beat you down with a rod,” he was angry at him. However, he could not help admitting the fact.

*One thought came across to me. God took the most valuable one from me because I had lived a rough sort of life. I thought like that. God wanted to correct my life to teach me to live straightforward by taking my beloved daughter.*

Although Doo-Hwan thought that the death of his daughter was because of his behavior, he could not explain his daughter’s death. He comforted himself by thinking that God took his daughter into Heaven when she was pure and sinless to a certain extent. For Doo-Hwan, his daughter should be in Heaven peacefully if God’s will was to change him. After he experienced a spiritual moment, he stopped smoking and drinking, and lived faithfully before God. He also believed that it was God’s plan for him to share his story so that anyone who lives like he had been living would also meet God, turn to God, and follow God.

Yuna believed that the death of her son was meaningless without God’s plan and will. Tae-Min jumped into the water with no hesitation to save his drowning friend when Tae-Min heard his voice “help me!” Yuna believed that God valued Tae-Min’s heart because he was willing to lay down his life for his friend.

*Whatever it was, my son's death should be accomplished in God's will and purpose. It should... certainly...and it is. If it was not, there is a problem. I cannot accept it without believing it was God's plan. So, I can bear it although I miss my son and wish I could have stayed with him longer. I believe every authority about life and death belongs to God. I believe that God loves me and loved my son more than I did. There was nothing to complain about to God.*

Yuna believed that Tae-Min did what Jesus did. Jesus lived his earthly life to save the marginalized from their poverty, sickness, and death. Once Yuna had a dream, Tae-Min was in a dark basement where he was taking people out of the water. Yuna was hurt by that scene because she wanted to dream about her son being peacefully in Heaven. However, she realized that Tae-Min had done the right thing, believing that in whatever way God used Tae-Min, it was God's perfect plan. Thus, Yuna remembered Tae-Min's life as God's son who lived a lofty life like Jesus. Yuna said, "If one fears the danger for his life, he cannot lay his life down for someone. That's human instinct, but Tae-Min did."

*One day, I saw Tae-Min in my dream. He came back to home and sat on the couch. I asked him how he came back home. He said, "Mom, I had to do that at the time." Then, he was gone. I thought he came home in the dream to comfort me. It seemed like he was telling me he was sorry. I know that he was the one who was needed on the day at the place to do it.*

Yuna gave a meaning to her son's death. Tae-Min was the absolutely necessary person who was able to save his friend on the day at the place to accomplish Jesus' love in God's plan.

### *Reconfirming their Mission*

Sung-Ho and Eunhee accepted their son's death as a test for them to concentrate on their mission that was already given from God. They were born Christian and they had lived their lives sincerely in service to God. Although the loss of their son caused them unbearable pain, they were able to tolerate the pain and recover from it somehow. They thought of the loss as God's shove that would increase their dedication to their mission

for Native Americans. The reason they moved from California to another State was to engage more fully in mission work by providing medical support for the Native Americans there. When Sung-Ho opened his oriental medical office in the city, patients crowded in to be treated. They easily settled down in that city. But, they delayed their promise to visit the Indian reservation. In addition, Chan-Min was newly born. They delayed their help to the mission with the excuse that Chan-Min was a baby. Then they lost Chan-Min through the accident. So they meditated on the loss and came to believe that there was a message for them.

*As a matter of fact, there was a promise with a missionary we had made when we moved to here. We promised that we would help the missionary as soon as we moved. That was the purpose for which we moved here. I think we changed the order for how we would accomplish the purpose. We set up the office and worked. Chan-Min was born. He was too young. There were many excuses that allowed us to delay the mission while the missionary was waiting for us.*

Sung-Ho and Eunhee reconfirmed their mission, and, since the loss of their son, they have continued going to the Indian reservation to provide them medical support.

Similarly, Brian thought of his loss as a way that God prepared him for his appointed task as a pastor. After the loss of his son, he met several church members who were dying. He visited them to offer prayers and he was able to talk naturally with them about death.

Brian thought that it is necessary for pastors to experience hardship such as a loss of this kind in order to prepare them for similar moments in their ministry. In addition, Brian reconfirmed his calling because he was struggling to make sure of his calling while studying at the theological school before the loss of his son.

*After I made decision, I entered theological seminary, and finished one semester. However, I was not satisfied with studying theology in order to be a pastor. I had complained to God, comparing my current life with the time when I received an adequate salary from my job. It was a totally different quality of life when I measured it by putting it on an economic scale. In fact, when I prayed, I told God*

*several times that I might not be able to do it. I suffered the loss while I was wrestling with God like that.*

Brian was well aware that he was born to fulfill his mother's promise to God after his sister died. Thus, he could not help reminding himself of it after the loss of his son. Coincidentally, his mother dedicated him to God after the loss of her daughter, and Brian lost his son when he had become unsure of his calling. Brian had to accept his loss as a message reconfirming his calling. He serves a local church now, but he is considering becoming a chaplain to take care of the dying and their families.

### Significant Perspective Changes on Life and Death

For the bereaved parents, one of the significant changes in their lives was to reorganize their priorities as they thought about the purpose of their lives. At the same time, their perspectives on the world and people were changed. Becoming more empathetic, the level of their understanding was deepened. They changed their attitudes toward their surviving children and realized the greater value of their family. Some interviewees wanted to achieve something meaningful and dedicated their lives to helping people who were in need. On the other hand, the bereaved parents began to have strong belief in Heaven and reunion with their child. In this fourth super-ordinate theme, *Significant Perspectives Changes on Life and Death*, three sub-themes are described including *Changes of Priority*, *Extended Understanding about Life and People*, and *Heaven Where my Child Is*.

#### *Changes of Priority*

After the loss of their child, the bereaved parents looked back over their lives to see how they had lived, and they thought about what important things had been in their

lives before the loss. Then they necessarily reorganized and rebuilt new priorities for their future lives; that was particularly true in regard to the value of life, the surviving children and family, and vocation.

For Eunhee, the first realization from the loss of her son was that she reversed the order of her priorities, particularly when she thought of things God had done for her; changing a medically impossible situation to make her pregnancy possible and letting them easily settle down in a new city. She realized that God showed her there was nothing impossible in any situation.

*After I lost my son by the accident, then, I realized the purpose of our lives and the order of our priorities. We had lived reversing the order. I did not perceive that every earthly thing was limited and there was nothing I could say, "That was mine." Because of my human desires, I forgot my promise to God, and I had lived arrogantly with earthly desires. God made me realize the fact.*

Eunhee's husband Sung-Ho also thought about the order of their priorities.

*I thought more about the purpose of my life after the death of Chan-Min. Of course, I already acknowledged the limitedness of human life, but I was awakened by seeing God take my 13 months old boy. After then, I changed the focus of my life to following God's will rather than clinging to earthly desires.*

After the losses of her children, Jane reversed the order of her priorities from a successful life being her top priority according to the standard of the world to her first priority being a healthy and happy life for her children. Jane had had high expectations for her children, but she realized that that was not an important value of life.

*It is a privilege and duty for mothers to bring up children healthily with affection, but I think I had many desires for my life career. I realized that it is worthwhile to dedicate one's life to take good care of children, to bring up the next generation to achieve great prosperity. With this realization, I threw my own desires away, and focused more on caring for my children. It became my life mission to be a mom. Since then, I have supported their lives to make them healthy and with affection I could wait until they were able to accomplish something of their own. These changes also eased my grief and made me thankful for my life.*

Jane's husband Kang-Soo thought how to live his life meaningfully after the losses.

*About 5 years after my children died, I decided to try to live my life sincerely as I am a father, a husband, and a child of my parents. I thought that I can face God with a clear conscience and see my deceased children honorably.*

The bereaved parents who were negligent in taking care of their child because of being actively involved in church activities regretted that and believe they should have had more time for their children instead of going to church. Yuna helped with administrative tasks for the church as a part-time job. Her church had a lot of meetings, worship services, and programs. She participated in almost all of these church activities day and night, leaving behind her son. Yuna felt remorse for not having more time with her son.

*Anyway, it was over. I could not reverse the situation, but I feel pain on my heart because I did wrong to my son. I attended every worship service. When I went to the church for Wednesday evening worship service and cell meeting once a week in the evening, Tae-Min was at home alone because he did not want to follow me to the worship and meeting. At the time, I thought that is my faith in God. If I were in the same situation, I would never do that. I would be with him. Why did I attend the service and leave my child behind? No way. Never! That is not what God wants. For no reason would I repeat the mistake.*

Sharon was also regretful about attending worship service day and night as a pastor's wife. She had thought that the family life of the pastor also was dedicated to the church as a matter of course. However, the loss of her son was an opportunity to change her mind.

*Before my son died, I was actively involved in church activities. When I went to Friday night prayer meeting, I had to take David with me. He was in a seat basket when I listened to the sermon, praised, and prayed. I don't know why I did that. While I reared my two other children, I have never participated in night activities. I would like to spare the time to be with my children.*

Regarding the choice of a job, Jisook thought about what would be more valuable. She took courses to be a teacher in the US because she was a middle school teacher in Korea. One day, the director of a nursing home who was one of the church members asked her if she would like to work in the nursing home. Jisook was reminded of her mother who



dedicated her life to raise herself and her children. Her mother passed away not long after her son Sam died. That influenced her to make the decision to work in the facility.

*I have not shown my gratitude to my mother. My mom always gave me her love. I wanted to repay it, but she died. When Sam was hospitalized, she came from Korea to take care of my daughter at home. When Sam died, my mom went back to Korea and passed away several years later. That troubled my mind, because I could not return my mother's love. While I was deciding about my job, I thought I could repay my mother's favor by directing myself toward the aged. So I gave up being a teacher, and have worked in the nursing home for 13 years.*

Jisook's decision was related to her changed life value from pursuing an earthly successful life to seeking after a meaningful life. She believed that living her life in the light of God's will is the first priority of her life.

#### *Extended Understanding about Life and People*

After the loss of her children, Jane realized that every day of life given to her was a miracle and God's grace. It made her more thankful for her life rather than complaining to God.

*After experiencing the deaths of my children, I thought about life a lot. Then I realized that my entire life was a miracle. If God had not allowed me to exist, I would never have lived. We cannot anticipate what's going to happen to us even in a short period of our future. What I can do is just give thanks to God and live well.*

On the other hand, Yuna perceived the eternal truth of God when she meditated on her life and the value of life.

*After I realized the truth of God, I looked down on even a million dollar house as shabby and even things made by luxury brands. Everything was like trash except the nature God created. No value. I realized that I had lived in this rubbish heap. I was a slave of this worthless trash. For me, now the purpose of my life is to practice Jesus' love to others truthfully. That's what God wants from me. God does not want me to be captured by useless things and earthly values.*

Some interviewees mentioned their extended understanding about people after the loss.

The death of their child caused a mindset that does not judge people's behaviors or

thoughts hastily.

*Before I experienced the loss, I wondered how Christians could commit suicide. I judged that they may have had a weak faith or they were fake Christians. Although I was a faithful Christian, I felt strong suicidal thoughts after my child passed away. I began to understand people who try to kill themselves. It came naturally to think how hard it was for them to bear the pain. After I underwent my own hardship, I thought about the situations they were in where they cannot be helped. I fathomed their unspeakable pain, suffering, within their situations. Empathy came from my heart and I understood them.*

For Brian, extended understanding was about divorce.

*I was in deep grief. I wanted to end my life. Whenever I saw my wife's face, I was reminded of my son. I thought I could not bear to see my wife anymore because my son's image was overlapped in her face. I fought with my wife a lot and thought about divorcing her. Passing through that time, I became understanding about why some bereaved parents divorced. I also thought that pastor's ministry was needed in this crisis time.*

After going through the grief process, it was not unusual for interviewees to be more empathetic and able to understand people who were deadlocked.

How can I say this? More empathetic? It was hard for me to get through the loss, but my life became more deepened. I think I understand more deeply about the sadness, happiness, gratitude, and hardship that happen in our lives.

For interviewees, their perspectives on life have changed to be more thankful and meaningful when they think about everyday life given to God and meditated on the value and purpose of life. In addition, their attitudes toward people have also changed, becoming more empathetic.

#### *Heaven Where my Child Is*

For the bereaved parents, Heaven is the place they have to go because they are confident that their child is in Heaven. Their faith in Heaven led them to the thought that they have to live their lives with faith in God so that they will meet with their child there. In addition, their perspectives on death have also been changed. They don't fear death.

Doo-Hwan had a strong will to go to heaven to see his daughter after he dies. He

perceived heaven as the place anyone can go unless committing a serious sin like murder and stealing. He thought smoking and drinking were not counted as a sin. However, later he changed his thought.

*I thought I can go to Heaven because I did not commit a serious sin. I did not steal anyone's possessions. I did not lie to anyone, and I did not commit a murder. However, after I began to have a strong faith in God, I realized that I needed to live sincerely before God and try to do something good so that I could go to Heaven. To see my daughter Lisa I decided to live without even a speck of shameful behaviors in order not to be humiliated when I face my daughter in Heaven.*

When Jane heard God's voice that her children were in Heaven, she thought that she needed to live her life assiduously with faith in God in order to join her children in Heaven. In the early time of the losses, Jane tried to read the Bible because she thought that was one of the ways to live sincerely before God. Later Jane changed her thought slightly.

*I did. Because I missed them too much, I had to try to hold on my faith to meet them in Heaven. As time passed by, I was reminded of one thought -- that God loved my children. They belong to God, not me. I think I will meet my children in Heaven not as their mother, but as we are all God's children.*

For Jisook, Heaven is also the place she has to go because her child is there. In addition, her fear of death disappeared after experiencing the deaths of her son and mother. For her, it does not matter whether she lives here on earth or there in Heaven if only she lives in faith in God.

*I am sorry to say this to God, but in fact, I want to go to Heaven because Sam is in Heaven not because it is the Kingdom of God. Because God took him to Heaven, I need to go there to see my son. My mother is also in Heaven. God prepared the place for us. I don't have any fear of death.*

Thinking about Heaven, most interviewees believed that they would immediately find out the reason why God took their children so early. Jisook, Kang-Soo, and Jane spoke the

same words, “I will demand from God an explanation of the death of my child when I go to Heaven.” They share a confident hope that they can ask God the reason.

For Eunhee, the attitude toward death has been changed. She became unafraid of death, and in some sense she lived preparing for her death.

*I don't have any fear about death. I think I live with a sense of preparing myself for death. For an instance, I arranged the house furnishings a few days ago thinking of the time after I die. I have not thought that I will live long. As long as live, I just want to do my best for my family.*

Likewise, the bereaved parents have strong faith in meeting their child in Heaven, and they became unafraid of death. For them, death is just one process in human life. Yuna has a belief in life and death. She explained, “I believe that as the world existed already before birth, a world before life also existed. Life is the period between birth and death. I believe that in regard to the concept of eternity, human thought will be different from God's. Thus, death is just a part of the whole cosmic process.”

### Sharing Their life Stories

After about 5 years had passed since the loss of a child, interviewees had opportunities to share their stories from time to time. Some interviewees were invited to tell their story how they got through the loss of their child. Some of them have met a situation in which they assisted parents who newly lost their child or who were in pain from a life hardship, and encouraged the younger generation to live their lives in a straightforward way. They indicated that the opportunity to share their story with others had positively influenced their healing process. This category of *Sharing Their Life Stories* was sorted into sub-themes of *Testimony*, *Wounded Healer*, and *Encouraging People*.

### *Testimony*

Some bereaved parents were invited to a spiritual retreat program as guest speakers to share their stories with participants in the retreat. The testimony they spoke was the story about the situation they had met, how they were able to get through their grief and how that related to faith in God. The testimony had meanings for the bereaved parents in two respects: First, they gained new understanding and insights about their experiences looking back at their grieving process. Second, they found greater worth in living when they heard the participants' responses. The participants were touched by their stories, and that led them to life changes.

Doo-Hwan spoke about the change of his life after his loss when he was invited to a radio station, meetings, and a spiritual retreat program. Speaking his testimony was first launched by his pastor asking him to tell his story in the church's spiritual retreat program held twice a year.

*One day, the pastor asked me to come over to the place where the spiritual retreat was held. I came by the retreat center. When I met the pastor, he asked me to give my testimony at the evening program. I was not prepared, but he said, "Then, write it down now." It was like an order. Because I trusted him, I wrote about my loss and my life before and after. From that time on, I have been invited to the spiritual retreat as a guest speaker every year. I heard some of them were touched by my story, and even some repented and returned to God. When I heard that, I was so happy.*

Kang-Soo and Jane have been invited to a spiritual retreat as guest speakers. At first, they hesitated to speak about their stories. However, they felt they gained new perspectives about their experiences after sharing their stories with the participants in the retreat. For Kang-Soo, it was hard to write and speak his life story in Korean, but he indicated that the process of writing his story helped him get through his grief.

*For me, I gained a lot of help from giving my testimony in the spiritual retreat.*

*When I wrote down my story, one of problems was to write it the Korean language. So I had to slowly write it down tracing my memory from the time when my children were hospitalized to the time after my children passed away. I had to arrange my thoughts and feelings at the time, and I needed to speak about how my faith in God developed in my grieving process as it is the testimony for believers.*

Kang-Soo also thought that he would appreciate it if his testimony influenced positively others' lives.

*From another aspect, the testimony had meaning for me. In fact, nobody wants to share sad stories with others, but I did. If there were some participants in the retreat who were in a similar situation or under pain from other life hardships, my testimony would help them have hope to get over their pain someday.*

Jisook was also invited to a spiritual retreat to share her story with the participants. From the testimony she understood not only her spiritual journey in the grieving process, but also her relationship with God.

*By doing the testimony, I recollected and adjusted pieces of my experiences. I benefited from sharing my story. In order to speak in front of the participants, I had to put my feelings into an arranged form and read several times to make sure of my experience. In addition, I wrote how my church members helped me and how I began to have strong faith in God thinking about my relationship with God.*

Sharing their story about the loss and afterlife benefited them in the process of recollecting the fragments of memories, arranging them in a written form, and thinking about God's intervention in the midst of their pain. In addition, the fact that they helped people made them feel their life was worth living with joy.

### *Wounded Healer*

The interviewees experienced a situation in which they comforted other bereaved parents in their community. The interviewees acknowledged that the pain of losing a child can only be perceived by parents who experienced the same pain. Most of them met other bereaved parents after their losses. Newly bereaved parents initiated contact with the interviewees to talk about their losses because they needed someone trustworthy who

was able to understand their feelings. Sometimes, some interviewees approached a newly bereaved parent naturally.

One of Sharon's fellow workers lost her son in a car accident. Sharon had an opportunity to talk with her. Sharon listened to her colleague with empathy. When the coworker cried with grief, Sharon could comfort her and she felt that she was also being healed at that moment.

*I became understanding of the meaning of wounded healer. Some of my church members said that I can be a wounded healer. But I did not grasp the meaning. After I experienced comforting the coworker because I had the same pain, I realized the meaning. God had a plan for me. I felt God worked through my pain.*<sup>173</sup>

Sharon experienced some other moments during which she could talk naturally about her loss to other bereaved people in an effort to give comfort. She was surprised that sharing her story could console other bereaved parents and bereaved persons.

Eunhee heard that one young member of the church had committed suicide. Eunhee knew the student because she had taught him at Sunday school. His body was found along with some drugs in his car. His mother could not believe it. She was shocked. One day, the mother called Eunhee by phone saying "I was reminded of you. I really wanted to see you." Eunhee also wanted to meet with her, but she had not been sure if the mother would want to see her. In fact, the mother was one who had said behind her back that Eunhee killed her son because she had been crazy for the church. However, Eunhee did not care about their criticism.

*She called me and apologized to me for slandering me at the time. I asked her how*

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<sup>173</sup> When Sharon mentioned the word "wounded healer," she and I were aware that the concept came from Henri Nouwen's book *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (1979). The book was introduced to Korea in the 1990s and became a bestseller. Now it has become a universal concept in Korea when people mentioned someone who has a deep wound helps other wounded persons.

*she is doing. Suddenly, she cried. She cried without speaking for thirty minutes. I just listened to her. After she cried and talked, I asked her to come out to have lunch with me. But, she was diffident about coming outside because she did not want to be seen by others. So I said, "I will be with you. Don't be worried." I picked her up, and we went a restaurant. She did not eat much because she kept crying. So I cried with her sitting by her, and I talked to her about her son how he was good. For anyone it would be hard to speak about the deceased child. But, for me, it was not that hard because I experienced my son's death and I had taught her son at Sunday school.*

The interviewees could be the best comforter for other bereaved parents because they understood the suffering and pain of the bereaved parents as well as their families' hardships. One of Jisook's church members lost her granddaughter. While the granddaughter was visiting at her house, she drowned in the swimming pool at her backyard. That happened about a year before her participation in these interviews. Jisook texted a message to her remembering it had been a year since her granddaughter was dead.

*"How are you doing? It has already been a year since your granddaughter Esther went to Heaven. If you planned to perform a memorial service on the first anniversary of your grandson, I would like to attend the service." Then she replied, "How have you lived with this pain for over 10 years? With this pain..." I understood how much she was in pain, but she did not show any emotional feelings and talked nothing about it at the church.*

In Brian's ministry after his loss, among the two thousand members of his church, he met three families who had lost their child through accidents. In a different way from other interviewees he visited bereaved parents after three years had passed since the death of a child. Of course, Brian also supported them when he attended funeral services and presented them with grief books. However, Brian had a reason to visit them some years later, he waited because he did not want to inject himself prematurely into their experience. He believed that they had to get through their grief in their own ways.

*I believed they needed their own process. When I encountered the bereaved*



*parents at the church, they asked me, "Pastor! Do you have any words for me?" Then, I responded that "Well, keep wrestling through." I knew that it seemed to treat them coldly. But they needed their own time and effort to get through it. Some members called me and said, "Pastor, please meet the bereaved couples." Then, I said, "I have my time to meet them, and this is not the right time for me. They need a time to contemplate their experience by themselves. Then, I will meet with them."*

Brian acknowledged that not all bereaved parent experienced grief in the same way. He believed that bereaved parents needed to give different meanings to their experiences by exploring their own situations. So, Brian offered the time for the bereaved parents of his church, he did not offer them care during the early period of their loss. That's the common sense of those who have gone through their own grief. They tend not to approach too early other bereaved parents who have just lost their child. Jisook also mentioned that she did not initially contact the bereaved woman who lost her granddaughter.

*I have not talked about my loss initially even to other bereaved parents. I became aware that no one can feel the same emotion even though they experienced the same event of losing their child. But, when I met a situation by chance, I tried to comfort them sharing my story. That would touch their heart, but they have their own ways of handling the emotional process, not the same as mine. I know that.*

Sometimes, Sung-Ho met several patients who lost their children when they visited his oriental medicine clinic. After the loss of their child, they visited his clinic because their physical condition became worse. When they mentioned their loss of a child, Sung-Ho said to them, "I am also a bereaved parent." When he talked about how he has gone through his own grief, it evoked their sympathy and affected treatment positively.

### *Encouraging People*

Sharing their experience of bereavement has played an important role in comforting and encouraging not only bereaved parents, but also the persons who suffered

from other life hardships. Experiencing the loss of a child is the one of the most unbearable pains and griefs of life. As interviewees have gone through the human ordeal, they have something to speak to others, particularly to younger generation.

After experiencing a transcendental moment, Jane tried to read the Bible having planned time to meditate on God's Words, which is called QT (Quiet Time). She also participated in a QT group in her church. Occasionally, some members of the group wanted to talk her about their hardships to be comforted and healed. Jane read some encouraging Bible words for them and prayed for them. Jane has realized that they recovered and were healed through her being and talking with them. That motivated her to enter college to study marriage and family therapy.

*As I spoke, did I become more empathetic? Before the loss of my children, suffering people were not in my sights. Now I can see. Because I was in depression for a long time, I easily recognized someone depressive. So, I asked them how they were doing and began to talk. I read Bible words for them and prayed for them. I led them to the QT group. They followed me well because they knew I am a bereaved parent. When I shared my experience with them, they opened their minds. I have seen God heal many members through contemplating God's words and sharing with each other in the group. Someone who had marital problems recovered, another who was abused by parents was healed, and the other who was depressive got well. I took that opportunity to study marriage and family counseling. God gave me a new mission. Observing people being healed, I felt the sense of being alive.*

As Kang-Soo began to have a clear understanding of the value of human life, he believed that it was his calling from God to share his realizations with the younger generation of his church. He also perceived that he had the responsibility to speak to them about life. Because he had been enlightened at a certain moment to confess God as his creator while he was searching for the meaning of his loss and his life, he wanted to speak about the relationship between life sufferings and a life of trusting God.

*I began to engage in EM (English Ministry) when I was a college student. As I am*

*now one of the oldest members, I became interested in the future of the younger generation. I did not think much about the purpose and value of life when I was in my twenties. Now I think it is a right time for those in their twenties to build a clear vision for their life by thinking about the purpose of life. They might think "why am I living?" I would like to talk with them about the basic values of life because I think I have point of view now. They know my situation and sometimes they have asked me how I was at the time of my loss. Then, it's my chance to speak. "You don't have to go through this, but one thing you have to learn is to practice your love now and here whether you go to college or get married. You don't have to wait until you go to Heaven. Experience it right here and right now. Love your brother and sister now. You don't have to wait until you die. You can experience it now." Like this, I talked to them, sharing my story.*

Whether it was a form of testimony to speak publicly or privately to individuals, sharing their life stories had a positive impact on others' lives because as wounded healers they had credibility.

#### Family as the Ground of Sustaining Life

Most interviewees mentioned that family was the most powerful source of the strength that sustained their lives. In some bereaved couples, wives showed more intense emotional pain than husbands. Three female interviewees experienced a similar process in the early stage of their grief. Because they were in deep grief and pain, they were unable to look after their families. When they had a moment of enlightenment, they realized there were family members who bore the same pain waiting for their care, and then they decided to live for them as mothers and wives. For the interviewees, the other motivation that enabled them to get through their grief was to give birth to another child or adopt a child. This category of *Family as the Ground of Sustaining Life* will be further explored in the three sub-themes of *The Spouse Bearing the Same Pain*, *Realization that There Was Another Child*, and *God Allowed Another Child*.

### *The Spouse Bearing the Same Pain*

In particular, wives among the bereaved parents indicated that their husbands were the most important source of their support throughout their grieving process. Three female interviewees had a hard time in the early grieving process because of severe depression. They asked their husbands for a divorce. However, their husband did not agree to their request, but maintained a calm posture. To the wives, their husbands seemed to deal with the loss of their child with rational thoughts and conduct. While wives were worried about going church, husbands did not seem to be worried about that. It was a difference between wives and husbands in ways of coping with their grief.

Recently, Eunhee said her husband “What if you had agreed with me when I was asking you for a divorce at the time? Thank you so much for being patient with me.” Her husband Sung-Ho responded that he did not even think that was her real intention. He understood that Eunhee had asked him because she was having such a hard time.

*If I had been alone at the time, I would not have gotten through my grief. My husband stood by me without a word. That was one motivation to overcome it. I understood about persons who wanted a divorce after the loss of a child. However, I believe that both wife and husband can get through the grieving process together by supporting each other. For me, my husband was so helpful.*

Although Jane found that her husband holds different thoughts about faith, she understands that the difference provided her with the motivation to overcome her grief. Jane actively sought pastors’ help for spiritual healing that would cure their children during their hospitalization. She invited pastors known to possess divine healing power. However, Kang-Soo had greater trust in medical opinion and treatment. After the loss of their children Jane appreciated her husband’s steady faith in God.

*My husband was an introspective person and a stable character. He served the church continuously. When my children were hospitalized, he attended a church*

*meeting. I felt bitter toward him. In that situation, I thought he did not need to attend the meeting. However, I realize now that his steady faith helped him get through his grief, and that also strengthened me to keep going to the church and reading the Bible.*

Kang-Soo and Jane still argue with each other because of different thoughts about faith.

*In order to clearly understand God's grace, Jane argued that people need to experience hardship. I did not agree with her. If people can realize God's grace only through suffering, God is cruel in that sense, and it is so tragic for humans. I argued that we must have another way to know God's grace, not through tragedy.*

Brian and Sharon had trouble with each other after the loss of their son. However, this problem had been within them even before the loss. When Brian quit his job and entered the theological seminary, Sharon was worried about their financial situation and about herself being a pastor's wife. She was seemingly supportive, but in her heart she did not want her husband to be a pastor. However, when God took their child in spite of their dedication, she could not understand God whom her husband had relied on. Sharon was disappointed by her husband and God. She felt resentment against both of them. However, Sharon and Brian shared the same mind at a certain point. They confessed faithfully that God allowed them the empathy they felt for each other, and that provided the motivation to get through their grief.

*Unexpectedly, I saw that my husband seemed to have a hard time. Of course, it was unbearable pain for us. I could not get through it easily. When I was struggling with my pain complaining about my circumstances, I looked upon my husband. He seemed to be forlorn and helpless. I think God allowed me to see that here was a man who suffered from the same pain that I felt. It gave me the motivation to get through grief together.*

*I had a special motivation to get through my grief. One day, when I looked at my wife I felt a great pity for her. I was ready to overcome this situation. Because I have met various hard situations throughout my life, I believed this would also be over at some point. But my wife was like a fragile vessel. To my wife the loss was a tremendously unbearable shock. So I decided that I would look after her. It was like a new life for me to live with my wife thinking about how I can support her.*

Jisook has not talked to her husband much about the deceased child because her husband is a typical style of Korean man who does not show his emotions. That was one of the reasons he did not want to participate in the interview. However, Jisook admitted that being with him was a strong support for her because she knew his feelings because he was the only one who was able to share the pain of the same experience.

*I talked with my daughter naturally about Sam sometimes, but did not talk with my husband about Sam. I was careful not talk to him about Sam because I knew that he tried to internalize his feelings. Nevertheless, he was the source of my strength just by being with me because I knew that he bore the same pain that was in me.*

Considering the loss of a child, bereaved couples knew that their spouse was the only person in the world who had experienced the same tragedy. So the wife and the husband acknowledged each other's feelings and pains although they did not express them. Although sometimes they argued with each other on issues, they knew that their spouses were their great resource in getting through their grief.

#### *Realization that There Was Another Child*

In fact, one of the motivations for some interviewees was to realize they had another child. When Jane heard the voice of God, God reminded her of her two surviving children. In response to the voice, she thought about the purpose and meaning of her life, and she decided to live her life faithfully for her family, particularly for her children.

Because Eunhee was seized by the deep grief and pain of her loss, she was unable to take care of her daughter. Some days after the loss, the principal and the teacher visited her. They said that her daughter was taken to the psychotherapist at the school, but the treatment could not proceed satisfactorily without her mother's help. She had not known that her daughter was being treated by therapy at her school. That awakened her to a sense of her responsibility. She realized that her daughter felt a sense of guilt for Sam's

death and hatred toward the friend who did not close the pool door. Eunhee decided to rise above her own grief to help her daughter.

Jisook so missed her son Sam that she spent most of her time in tears every day. While she was supported by her church, yearning for her son pierced her heart when she was alone. Sometimes, she engaged in unusual actions. When her daughter had observed her, she finally came to Jisook and told her how hard it was for her to see her mother's grieving.

*When I was struggling with my grief, my daughter cried with me and said, "Mom, I am here with you. Do you count only brother as your child? Do you want your brother alive instead of me? Instead of him should I have died? Don't you think of me? I need my mom too." When I saw my daughter's struggling, I realized that I should not live only in my emotional pain. I needed to get out of my grief.*

With other support, bereaved parents who had a surviving child had a moment of realization that there was another child.

#### *God Allowed Another Child*

Sharon became pregnant six months after her son died. When her husband Brian prayed to God, he received a message that God allowed them another child. Oddly enough, his wife and his mother also received that message at the same time. However, Brian was worried whether he would be able to raise a child again. In addition, he was still grieving for his dead child. Brian and Sharon worried that God might also take this new child to Heaven early. When they gave birth to the child, they said it was the starting point of their recovery.

*It happened to me, my wife, and my mother at the same time. The message was that God would allow us to have another child. It was an unpleasant message for me. At the time, I did not have the courage to sleep with my wife, and I was afraid of having a baby. So, I talked to my wife about the message, and she said that she knew already what I was telling her. On the day we went to bed together, she became pregnant. When the baby was born, I was unable to hold the baby. My*

*mother-in-law said to me "It's okay. The baby will not go away. Give him your love as much as you can." Approaching the baby was a process that took me almost a year. When I held him on my heart with love, the recovery process began within me.*

Although having another child was the starting point of his healing, Brian was unable to have much joy with the baby because he was grieving for David. However, some years after the baby son, they gave birth to a daughter. Maybe, it was because several years passed since David had passed away, but Brian and Sharon were much healed from their pain of loss when their daughter was born and they again found joy in raising the son and daughter. Sharon felt that they became a real family for the first time after the birth of the daughter.

*I don't have much joy although I have another son. I didn't take good care of him because I felt God would take him from me again. I educated him strictly to live independently. I didn't give him much love. However, I gave birth to a daughter. She was adorable. I gained much strength and joy from raising her. Now I feel we are a family.*

God also allowed Eunhee to have another child. Because she was not in good medical condition, she did not expect to have a child again. However, God gave her a child at age 40, and she was able to get through her grief while she was rearing the child.

*I was too old to be pregnant. Who knew that God would give me this beautiful daughter? God wiped my tears from my eyes, and I spent less time focused on thoughts of Chan-Min. I felt that God comforted us this way when we collected our minds and paid more attention to the mission.*

Doo-Hwan and his wife have lived with their first daughter since Lisa died because Doo-Hwan's wife became very attached to this daughter after the loss of Lisa. When their first daughter became engaged, her mother's only condition for allowing him to marry her daughter was that her parents would live with her. So they were married and gave birth to a daughter and a son. Doo-Hwan and his wife were joyful when they were with their



grandchildren. In particular, the granddaughter looked like Lisa. Doo-Hwan gave her much love and sometimes called her Lisa by mistake. Doo-Hwan believed that God comforted and healed him through his grandchildren.

Jane and Kang-Soo adopted a daughter. At first, Kang-Soo reluctantly agreed with Jane for the adoption. Jane persuaded him that they should apply because the process of adoption took a long time, and he could say no at the end of the process if he still did not want a child. When a baby girl's picture was given to them, Jane and Kang-Soo joyfully made the decision to adopt her.

*I had thought about adoption even before my children died. Although I was healed from the pain of the losses through accepting death and eternal life, I could not bear the yearning for physical touch of my children. The feeling of missing that penetrated to my very bones. I missed physical attachment. So I decided to adopt a child. When the baby arrived at my home, we began to laugh again. We took care of her with love because we knew how valuable a life was. Rearing a child needed so much energy. I gained the energy and strength while I busily concentrated on the work of raising the baby.*

After adopting the child, Kang-Soo felt that he came back to life, and thought that the baby was a great gift from God. All his family was revitalized by seeing the baby. Kang-Soo said, "Without the baby, our grieving process would have been longer."

Yuna's sister asked her to live with her family, but Yuna did not want to bother their family life because of her grief. Yuna adopted a cat some days after her son died. One of Tae-Min's friend asked Yuna if she wanted a cat, but she said no at first because Yuna had never had a pet even though Tae-Min had wanted a cat when he was alive. Then Tae-Min's friend asked again presenting a picture of the cat. Yuna was surprised when she saw the picture. The cat in the picture was the one Tae-Min wanted to have. Immediately, Yuna adopted the cat, and the cat was cute and lively like her son. The cat was like her family. When Yuna came back home, the cat welcomed her. When she was

sad, tired, and tearful, the cat was always with her. That gave her a lot of strength.

### Remembering the Child

The seventh super-ordinate theme is *Remembering the Child*. Among interviewees, there were some differences in the way of remembering their deceased child. Some interviewees have performed anniversary services yearly on the day of child's death, but some have not. For those who buried their child, visiting the cemetery was one of the important ways to remember the child. Most interviewees remembered their child from time to time naturally, but not intentionally in daily lives. Sometimes, they were reminded of the child when someone accidentally or intentionally mentioned the child. However, it did not bother them or hurt their feelings. They would rather like others to remember the bright sight of their child. In this category of the main theme, four sub-themes will be presented including *Treasuring the Memory of the Child*, *Visiting the Cemetery*, *Anniversary Service*, and *Talking about the Child*.

#### *Treasuring the Memory of the Child*

In the early years after the death of Sam, the yearning for him led Jisook to do certain things in order to remember him. She called him on his cell phone to hear his voice and left a message every day until the phone service ended. In addition, Jisook enjoyed visiting Sam's online blog where there were his writings and pictures until the blog service was closed suddenly due to inactivity. In the early time of the loss, these actions to keep a continuous bond with Sam were helpful for her grieving process. Jisook mentioned that when others who did not know she was a bereaved parent asked her how many children she had, she answered for 3 or 4 years. "I have one son and one daughter."

Some times after Sam passed away, Jisook's husband wanted to throw away

Sam's belongings and they did, but Jisook has kept a memorial box. In the box, Jisook put a diary, an album, and a video tape. The diary was written when she took care of Sam in the hospital. The album was created by Sam's friends who collected his pictures and writings from Sam's online blog. The video tape was recorded when the funeral service was held. Jisook treasured this memorial box. However, she has not opened it in 10 years.

About 5 to 6 years after Jane's children died, one of her friends called her "Danny's mom!" The friend told her she was sorry. However, Jane said, "No, it is okay! I am Danny's mom forever. I don't think I am not Danny's mom because I lost him." She rather liked having someone call her Danny's mom or Kay's mom. She appreciated her friend for remembering her child.

*When I remembered the dear sight of my children, I was thankful for their lives. Then, I was reminded that I had raised a smart son for 12 years and an adorable daughter for 3 years. I cherished the years of raising them and being with them. I thanked God that I was given the children. I am proud of being their mom. So, I was okay when someone called me "Danny's mom" and "Kay's mom."*

Jane's husband Kang-Soo believed that he and his children were spiritually bonded. He was not interested in keeping his children's belongings. However, he cherished the memory of his children. Sometimes, he watched video clips they had recorded of family trips, birthday parties, and other activities when the children were alive. Kang-Soo frankly mentioned that he began to forget their features. So he watched videos and looked at pictures to remember them.

#### *Visiting Cemetery*

Among the seven deaths of the children, two children under two years of age at the time of death were cremated, and five children who died after three years of age were buried in the ground. Most parents visited the burial ground quite often in the early years

of the loss of the child. Now, after more than 10 years have passed, they visit the graveyard at least once a month. The reason the bereaved parents keep visiting is because they still miss their child and want to maintain a continuous relationship with their deceased child.

Doo-Hwan has visited his daughter's graveyard with his wife every week since she died. Sometimes, he skipped it because of busy schedule. For him, the visiting is not just a visit, but it is a kind of ritual to see his daughter. He expressed it this way: "I go out with my wife to see my daughter Lisa every week." When he and his wife visited Lisa, he replaced the old flowers with new ones, took care of the grass around her tomb, and prayed to God. "God, we are here to see Lisa. We know that Lisa is not here, but we feel comfort when we are here. Please God help us meet Lisa in Heaven when we die."

Jisook visited Sam's grave every Saturday for five years. She did more often before she began to work. However, she lessened the time of her visits after watching a TV program. The program introduced a woman who visited her son's grave every day. The woman even pitched a tent by the grave and ate lunch there to spend more time with her deceased child. When Jisook watched it, she thought something about the woman looked wrong and abnormal, and also reflected her own practice that could be regarded as abnormal by others. After that time, Jisook visited Sam's grave once a month.

Yuna visited her son's grave from time to time to remember her son Tae-Min. Sometimes, she thought, "Why am I here? He is not here." She believed that Tae-Min's soul is in Heaven even though his body was buried in the ground. However, Yuna visited Ta-Min's grave to remember him once a month including days of his birthday, Thanksgiving, Easter, and Christmas.

While most parents visited the grave of their deceased child, Jane thought there thought it was meaningless to visit the graves of her children. Instead, Jane tried to make a meaningful event for her children.

*There are only rotten bodies in the grave. Visiting the grave does not have any meaning for me. I wanted to create a meaningful event on the day of the deaths of my children. I invited pastors on the day to show my appreciation to them and to remember my children. I am considering some other events such as making a donation to the hospital my children were hospitalized in or to a cancer society. I have thought a lot about how I can meaningfully remember my children. Eventually, I will do that, but I haven't yet.*

In the case of cremation, Sung-Ho has done a ritualistic act; his family visited the lake where they spread the cremated ashes. They took a boat on the lake remembering Chan-Min. It can be compared with visiting the graveyard. In addition, Sung-Ho has enjoyed hiking with his daughter. One day, when they arrived at a peak of a mountain, his daughter named it Chan-Min's peak. From time to time, they have hiked the mountain remembering Chan-Min.

#### *Anniversary Service*

Most interviewees performed the first anniversary service on the day of the death of their child. However, they stopped performing the anniversary service the following year. In Korean culture, the anniversary service for the dead is an important way to remember the deceased. However, in the case of a child's death, the anniversary service is not allowed in the culture.

Brian performed the anniversary service of his son for three years. However, his parents said, "Don't do it anymore. Parents who lose their child must send the child away." In addition, Brian thought it would not be good if it were seen by their children. So, he stopped doing the service after three years.

Kang-Soo's parents asked Kang-Soo and Jane to visit the cemetery when the days of *Choo-seok* (thanksgiving in Korea), *Jungwall-Choharoo* (the first day of the year,) and *Gi-il* (the day of the death of the person) arrived, and recommended that they invite the pastor to come worship at their home on the anniversary day of their children's deaths. They invited the pastor, and the pastor provided worship services at home and at the graveyard on the anniversary of their children's death for the first three or four years. Eventually, after the pastor retired, they did not feel that they wanted to continue the service.

Doo-Hwan invited his pastor to perform the first anniversary service of his daughter's death, but he has not performed it since then. He said, "I thought that the anniversary service was meaningful. But, I visited Lisa's grave every week to see her and pray for her. Instead of the service, I visit Lisa on the day." In addition, he indicated that he did not want to be a burden to the pastor, relatives, and church members by inviting them on the day.

On the other hand, Jisook has performed the anniversary service of the death of her son every year since her son died. In the first anniversary serviced, it was led by her pastor, and some church members were invited. After then, Jisook performed the anniversary service with her family. While the anniversary service of the death of their parents was conducted by her husband, the service for her son was conducted by Jisook. It is unusual for a woman to conduct a death-related ritual in the Korean culture. However, Jisook said, "I have done it because I knew that my husband was still grieving for Sam, and I did not want to hurt his heart."

*Talking about the Child*

Sung-Ho has not done any special ritual on the anniversary day of Chan-Min's death. However, his family has always talked about Chan-Min to cherish his memory when they have gathered together at dinner on the day. After his daughter went to a college, Sung-Ho sent a message to her. "Remember, today is the day your brother went to Heaven." Sometimes, Sung-Ho and Eunhee have talked about Chan-Min openly even to their second daughter who was born after Chan-Min. When they looked Chan-Min's pictures together, they explained to her about Chan-Min and his death. So their second daughter already perceives that she will meet her brother Chan-Min in Heaven.

Brian also talked with his son about David. At first, he and his wife wanted to keep it secret from their children, but they changed their mind and decided to share the story of David's death with their children. When his son became nine years old, Brian took him outside to spend time with him and talk about the death of David. The first response from his son was that he seemed to be excited. "Wow, I had a brother!" Brian said, "He seemed to take the story about David not seriously. I think when he grows up I need to explain to him more details about how David died, how he was born, and what I learned about the values and purpose of our lives."

Kang-Soo and Jane shared their feelings with each other and talked about memories of their deceased children from time to time, particularly on their birthdays or the day of their deaths. Their birthdays had more meaning to Kang-Soo than the day of their deaths, while Jane valued remembering them on the day when her children passed away. Kang-Soo explained that "I have thought about *Gi-il*. Maybe, the day can be more important because my children went to Heaven on that day. However, for me, I live in this world, not in Heaven. Recently, I thought that what they were born in this world were

gifts for me that I received from God. So, their birthdays are meaningful to me because I received the gift on those days.”

For the most interviewees, talking about their deceased child with their family was natural, not a subject they avoided. When they talked about the child with family and close friends, the conversations were mostly delightful because they remembered the bright side of their memories about the child. Visiting grave sites and conducting rituals were also helpful for the interviewees to help them cherish their memories of the child. In their own ways of remembering the child, they built a continuous bond with their deceased child.



## CHAPTER 5

### INTERPRETIVE TASK: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS IN INTERDISCIPLINARY INTERPRETATION

In the previous chapter, the experiences of bereaved parents were examined under the seven super-ordinate themes that clarify the role played by Christian spirituality in helping bereaved parents cope with the loss of their child. The purpose of this chapter is to look at the findings through diverse lenses to more clearly interpret the role of Christian spirituality in a time of grief. The findings are discussed in the light of social sciences and differing theologies. These discussions involve a dialogue between meaning-making and narrative perspectives, between a theory of spirituality and ritual theory, and between Western feminist liturgy and Korean feminist theology. Because it is an interdisciplinary exchange of views, all theories and theologies will be accorded equal value as they engage in a dialogue with the diverse interpretations and multiple perspectives of the bereaved parents.

This chapter has two important sections. Section one is a dialogue between meaning-making theory and the narrative perspective. From among several grief theories of psychology, I adopted narrative therapy as the appropriate partner of this dialogue with meaning-making theory and, in addition, the narrative theological perspective will be drawn upon for the discussion. Section two involves a dialogue between spirituality and ritual from a feminist theological perspective. The relationship between ritual and spirituality will be explained. From the perspective of ritual and feminist liturgy, bereaved parents' experiences will reflect on the themes *Faith Community as a Source of Support* and *Remembering the Child*. Then, the perception of bereaved parents' images of

God and Jesus will be explored from a Korean feminist theological perspective. This interdisciplinary approach will enable us to reflect on bereaved parents' experiences from diverse perspectives and from those reflections to obtain insights and implications for improved pastoral care and counseling for bereaved parents.

### Dialogue between Meaning-Making Theory and Narrative Perspectives

Psychologists and counselors have attempted to understand the experiences of bereaved individuals by conducting numerous research studies of bereavement and, based on the results of their studies, they established psychological theories of grief. Grief theories were reviewed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

### Why Meaning-Making Theory?

Early psychological theories recommended separation from attachment with the deceased child so that bereaved parents could avoid the emotional pain of being reminded of the child. Considering the findings of this study, that psychological theory does not correspond to the lived experiences of bereaved parents. As seen in the theme *Remembering the Child*, parents treasured the memory of the deceased child and visited the cemetery regularly because they wanted to remember their child; they didn't want to erase the memory of their child. From the activities of remembering the child, bereaved parents gained both comfort and strength.

On the other hand, Bowlby's attachment theory can explain experiences of some of the bereaved parents. The theory also focuses on detaching the parents' bond with the deceased child, but it suggests that creating a new attachment can help bereaved parents overcome their grief. Under the theme of *Family as the Ground of Sustaining Life*, it was reported that having another child comforted bereaved parents and gave them a new

source of joy. In other words, developing a renewed attachment to surviving children or developing a new attachment to a child born after the loss of their child supported the bereaved parents by providing them with new value and purpose of life. For them, the renewed sense of purpose came naturally after having another child. They did not intend to give birth to a child in order to think no more of the deceased child. They still cherished the memory of the deceased child. Applying attachment theory to experiences of bereaved parents, God can also become a new attachment for bereaved parents. Some grieving parents acknowledged that after the loss they engaged in more church activities and decided to dedicate their lives more completely to God.

Based on the attachment theory, Bowlby and his colleague Collin Murray Parkes developed their grief theory that identified four phases of the process: shock and numbness, yearning and searching, despair and disorganization, and re-organization and recovery. Bowlby and Parkes believed that the bereaved individuals must move through the first three phases before they can experience the fourth phase of rediscovering value in life and establishing a new worldview. However, when it was applied to the grieving process for bereaved parents, their grief theory had gaps. In task theory, Worden seems to grasp the significance of that gap. In the third task of grief work, Worden suggests three types of adjustment to the loss, namely external, internal, and spiritual. All deaths cause painful emotions and many deaths challenge existing worldviews and spiritual beliefs of bereaved individuals. They need to adjust to the new environment by searching for the meaning of the loss and of their own lives. For bereaved parents, this process of the search for meaning is necessary. The theme of *A Moment of Encountering God* showed that bereaved parents met God in a transcendental experience while they were searching

for the meaning of the loss of their child. For the interviewees, the most important experience in their grieving process was finding the meaning of their lives or giving meaning to their lives even when they did not receive an answer from God for why their child had to die.

At this point, the meaning-making theory offers explanations of how bereaved parents pass through their spiritual journey to find a new meaning of their lives. In the seven categories of super-ordinate themes, three themes of *A Moment of Encountering God*, *God Gives Their Lives Meaning*, and *Significant Perspective Changes on Life and Death* had to do with their spiritual journey to accommodate themselves to painful circumstances through a search for meaning. Meaning-making is essential to the successful experience of bereaved parents in coping with the loss of a child. It uniquely describes how bereaved parents construct meaning of the loss and their lives in the grieving process. Thus, the meaning-making theory was included as a necessary partner in the dialogue with the narrative perspective.

#### Theoretical Backgrounds of Meaning Making and Narrative Approaches

The meaning-making theory has developed from perspectives of social-constructivism that emphasize a view of human beings as “inveterate meaning makers,” and “weavers of narratives.”<sup>174</sup> Meaning is created through narratives that contain values and beliefs influenced by one’s personal and social experiences. According to Robert A. Neimeyer, humans are inclined to construct and maintain a meaningful self-narrative that is “an overarching cognitive-affective behavioral structure that organizes the ‘micro-narratives’ of everyday life into a ‘macro-narrative’ that consolidates our self-

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<sup>174</sup> Robert A. Neimeyer, “Narrative Strategies in Grief Therapy,” *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* 12 (1999): 67.

understanding, establishes our characteristic range of emotions and goals, and guides our performance on the stage of the social world.”<sup>175</sup> The self-narrative constructs individuals’ meaning systems based on their core assumptions that organize their behaviors and perceptions so as to interpret their experiences and relationships with others.<sup>176</sup> The system of meaning is internally consistent, but is also supported by culture and religious beliefs.

In this social constructivist approach, Neimeyer views the role of meaning-making as central to the process of grieving.<sup>177</sup> If people encounter traumatic or unexpected life events such as the death of a loved one, their core assumptions about the world are challenged. The bereaved individuals may ask questions about human morality, divine existence, and afterlife. They are motivated to engage in a search for meaning to make sense of their experiences and restore their lives. This search for meaning can be referred to as the meaning-making process, which involves understanding the situation from different perspectives and reconstructing the values, beliefs and goals of their lives in order to regain consistency among them. Wendy Lichtenthal and her colleagues illustrated findings of recent research which revealed that bereaved individuals who reconstructed meanings of traumatic losses showed better adjustment to the loss and higher levels of psychological well-being.<sup>178</sup> However, they also indicated that various domains of meaning challenged bereaved parents because the meaning-making process is

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<sup>175</sup> Robert A. Neimeyer, “Fostering Posttraumatic Growth.” *Psychological Inquiry* 15 (2004): 53–54.

<sup>176</sup> Neimeyer, “Narrative Strategies in Grief Therapy,” 67.

<sup>177</sup> Robert A. Neimeyer, Laurie A. Burke, Michael M. Mackay, and Jessica G. van Dyke Stringer. “Grief Therapy and the Reconstruction of Meaning: From Principles to Practice,” *Contemporary Psychotherapy* 40 (2010): 74.

<sup>178</sup> Wendy G. Lichtenthal, Joseph M. Currier, Robert A. Neimeyer, and Nancy J. Keese, “Sense and Significance: A Mixed Methods Examination of Meaning Making After the Loss of One’s Child.” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 66, no. 7 (2010): 792.

a complicated phenomenon.<sup>179</sup>

While meaning-making is “an umbrella term” to explain specific processes that contribute to adaptation to bereavement and other stressful life events, two distinct dimensions of meaning-making have been labeled “sense making” and “benefit making.”<sup>180</sup> Originally, Ronnie Janoff-Bulman and Cindy McPherson Frantz classified the search for meaning into two main concepts: meaning as *comprehensibility* and meaning as *significance*.<sup>181</sup> Comprehensibility is referred to as sense-making, which constructs an explanation of an event that makes sense in light of the pre-existing assumptions of the individual. Meaning as significance is referred to as benefit-making, which includes the process of determining the value of the event in one’s life and finding benefit from the experience.

In a similar way, Crystal Park and other scholars prefer to use the terms “global meaning” and “situational meaning” as two levels of the meaning-making process. “Global meaning” refers to “individuals’ general orienting systems” to interpret their experiences of daily life, and “situational meaning” refers to “the influence of global meaning in the context of a particular situation.”<sup>182</sup> Recently, Neimeyer and his colleagues explained these processes as a concept of assimilation and accommodation.<sup>183</sup> Sense making is an attempt to “assimilate the experience of a loss” into pre-existing beliefs and self-narratives in an effort to maintain consistency with core beliefs about self

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<sup>179</sup> Lichtenthal et al., 792.

<sup>180</sup> Lichtenthal et al., 793.

<sup>181</sup> Güler Boyraz, Sharon G. Horne, and Thomas V. Sayger, “Finding Meaning in Loss: The Mediating Role of Social Support between Personality and Two Construals of Meaning,” *Death Studies* 36 (2012): 520.

<sup>182</sup> Crystal L. Park, “Implicit Religion and the Meaning Making Model,” *Implicit Religion* 14, no. 4 (2011): 405-06.

<sup>183</sup> Neimeyer et al., 74.

and the world. It involves reconstructing perceptions about the loss to reassure the challenged beliefs and identities. Benefit making is another attempt to “accommodate to the loss” by developing a new understanding of the self and the world. Sometimes, it brings about personal growth and hidden benefit in relation to a new field of social relationships.

Whether the two-dimensional concepts of meaning-making are articulated as sense making and benefit making, or global meaning and situational meaning, or assimilation and accommodation, the grieving process of parents after the loss of a child reflects the need to make sense of the loss, change their global beliefs and reshape values and the purpose of their lives in a meaningful way. Not all bereaved parents engage in the meaning-making process, but the process of meaning reconstruction assists bereaved parents to better adjust to living in the new environment without the child and to gain a new perspective on their lives.

On the other hand, the meaning-making process can be combined with the narrative approach. Narrative therapy has developed under the influence of social-constructionism, the theory that individuals’ narratives are the origin and solution of problems formed by social factors.<sup>184</sup> The narrative approach is rooted in the presupposition that narratives develop from the human need to understand the meaning of life. The reality of human lives is shaped by stories they have lived, heard and spoken. In narrative therapy, therapists help people find their own and their family’s narratives and create new narratives so that they recognize who they are and the meaning and purpose of

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<sup>184</sup> Martin Payne, *Narrative Therapy: An Introduction for Counsellors*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 33.

their lives.<sup>185</sup> Therefore, the goal of narrative therapy is to help people create alternative stories in order to recognize the positive meaning of their lives.

In narrative therapy, people construct their experiences in understandable and meaningful ways by telling stories. In other words, their experiences are seen through the lens of the story and constructed into an acceptable narrative form. In the end, the story decides the meaning with which people intend to explain their experiences. The story expresses a particular part of the whole of their experience. Individuals tend to place a great deal of weight on specific experiences in the process of identifying themselves and the world. However, if they face an unexpected event in their lives, the plot of their dominant story is broken, and they struggle to reform their narrative because they have developed their own and their family's narrative based on a chosen perspective of their life experiences.

Viewed from the perspective of narrative therapy, the loss of a child disrupts the self-narrative flow because the anticipated sequence of events is destroyed. This can result in a sense of confusion and an inability to place the event meaningfully into the narrative as a whole. Bereaved parents are left with a sense of meaninglessness and vulnerability. Recovery from deep grief involves reconstruction of the story of the life event so that the loss can be incorporated into the narrative, and a sense of meaning can be restored. Both sense making and benefit making play an important role not only in constructing a new story of the experience that reappraises beliefs and worldview, but also increases an appreciation of life.

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<sup>185</sup> Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1996), 409.



### Making Sense of the Loss of a Child in One's Spiritual Journey

Seeing loss from the perspective of the meaning-making theory, the grieving process of bereaved parents can be a spiritual journey to find meaning in their adjustment to the loss. For the interpretation of findings, I have attempted to reorganize themes that are related to the meaning-making process. I have concluded that the spiritual journey can be divided into two processes in accordance with responses to the loss. All interviewees initiated questions in the early time of loss: "Why did my child have to die?" or "Why did it happen to me?" These questions seem to have the same meaning. However, although these questions are similar in that they originated with the loss of a child, the first question has more to do with the loss of the child, and the second question focuses more on the meaning of loss to the bereaved parent. Thus, I regard the meaning-making process as one that begins by asking God the question "Why?" and the process then diverges in accordance with the rest of the question.

In my analysis of the idea, I noted that half of the interviewees who asked the "Why" question focused more on "Why my child?" These parents experienced the entire process, both sense making and benefit making, while the other half who asked the question 'Why did this happen to me?' were more focused on how they were changed by the event. These parents engaged only in the process of benefit making. All interviewees were Christians; they all asked God for the reason so they could make sense of the loss. However, some bereaved parents naturally accepted the loss without struggling to make sense of the death of a child, experiencing it as a unique event, and complaining about it to God. For example, Sung-Ho said that he accepted his son's death naturally and relied on his faith in God. He stated that "Of course, I was in pain. I am not boasting myself to

be a faithful Christian, but this was God's plan. I thought about how God would use me through the experience...I was worried about my wife and my daughter, but I have never been troubled with the fact that I lost my son."

In other words, Sung-Ho was concerned more about "Why me?" and with thinking how God would use him through the experience, which led him directly to the realization of God's will without the process of sense making. Sung-Ho believed that God gave him a message through his son's death. He accepted the loss as God's shove to increase his dedication to their mission for Native Americans. Doo-Hwan also realized God's will to change him to live a straightforward life without the process of sense making. Jisook did not search for the reason for her son's death, but she realized that God had prepared the circumstances in less stressful situations that would make her ready to accept her son's death.

However, whether bereaved parents tried to make sense of the loss of their child or accepted the loss naturally with faith in God, all interviewees' journeys met at the point in the process of 'Realization of God's Will and Love.' Then, they changed their attitudes toward God, the world and their relationships with others. Finally, they engaged in the process of 'Benefit Making.' In Figure 1, I present the process of the spiritual journey of interviewees moving from the initial Why questions to sense making or accepting and to benefit making.

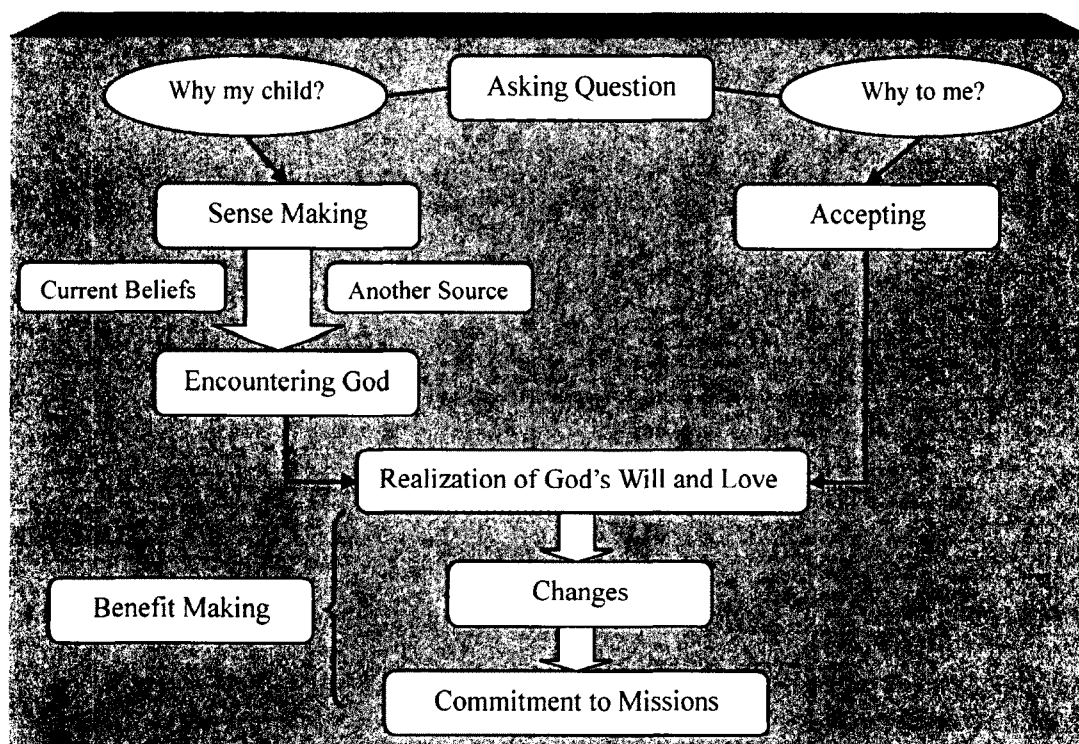


Figure 1 The Process of the Spiritual Journey to Find Meaning

### *Sense Making*

The search for meaning began with the question 'Why?' Bereaved parents who went through the sense-making process were more concerned initially about why God took their child away from them. After their losses, they asked God the reason for the death of their child. After they had searched for the meaning, their questions changed to why God gave them this suffering. In facing the most traumatic life event, their pre-existing beliefs and goals were challenged. Although their faith was shaken by the loss, some bereaved parents still relied on their faith in God and their pre-existing Christian beliefs as they passionately looked for the answer. They believed that only God could give them the answer. While they were crying out in the midst of deep grief to find the reason for the loss, they experienced an encounter with God or they faced God with a

realization of God's omnipotence and love.

The experience of Jane showed this process graphically. After the losses of her two children, Jane blamed God and asked God why God took her children. Her expected future and hope for children were shattered, and her beliefs in God's love and benevolence were challenged. She wanted to throw out her faith, but she continued to go to church holding onto God and God's Word. Jane searched for the meaning of her children's deaths within her faith tradition by reading the Bible and praying to God. In this ongoing process, Jane encountered God in transcendental moments: seeing a vision and hearing God's voice. In particular, when she read and meditated on John 3:16, she was touched by God's work of salvation; that God's only son had been sent to save the world. For Jane, it was the starting point of her healing and recovery. It led her to the process of benefit making.

Jane's husband Kang-Soo also relied on his faith in God after the losses of his children. Asking God for the meaning of the deaths of his children, he tried to find meaning within his current faith tradition. However, he ended up at a point at which he had to make a choice whether to remain in his faith or leave his church because he was unable to find the meaning, and God did not give him the answer. He stated that "I did not get any answer from God. I tried to find the answer by reading the Bible and praying to God. That was useless. I tried to solve the problem, but even today I don't know why my children had to die. Why did they suffer from that disease? However, I had to make a choice at a certain point." Kang-Soo made a decision that he lives in a world where God rules. In all his efforts to make sense of his children's death, the story of Job in the Old Testament gave him a reason why God did not answer: God has authority to do that.

Kang-Soo realized that humans, as the ones who are created, cannot ask that kind of question of God. Finally, he confessed that “God is my God. God is creator and I am created.”

On the contrary, other bereaved parents sought for another resource to make sense of their loss because they thought their current Christian tradition could not give them the answer. Although they did not leave their church, they tried to find meaning from another tradition such as the Catholic faith and its spirituality. After loss of her child, Yuna thought that her current Christian faith could not provide her with any meaningful reason why her son had to die. She sought to find the answer from thoughts and lives of famous spiritual thinkers such as Henri Nouwen, Thomas Merton, and Teresa of Avila. From reading books by spiritual thinkers, Yuna had a spiritual moment in which she was able to feel Jesus’ pain, as if she was where Jesus was crucified 2,000 years ago. Then she came to realize Jesus’ sacrifice and love and began to love Jesus rather than just know about Jesus. Then her faith became more focused on practicing Jesus’ love in her daily life as her son Tae-Min practiced Jesus’ love when he lay down his life for his friend.

After the loss of his two-year-old son, Brian could not believe why God took a baby so early. He was unable to find the answer ‘Why, God?’ He sought for the answer about his son’s death from spiritual traditions and authors who could understand human suffering. While Brian kept searching for the meaning of the death of his son and for the meaning of his own life, he received a message from God that led him to make a choice whether to end his life or to accept the message as the basis of his life. He chose the message God gave him and decided to live his life sincerely dedicated to God. However, his question about the reason why his son had to die still remained unresolved. When he

was meditating on it, he realized that God is the Lord of the universe; he was reminded of Job's story. He shifted his question from 'Why, God?' to asking 'How could he advance his life forward?' The change of his question led him to dedicate himself to pastoral ministry for the sick and the dying.

### *Benefit Making*

According to Crystal Park, the purpose of meaning making is to "reduce discrepancy," and make a "positive reappraisal," of a situation, and identify a point of benefit through it.<sup>186</sup> Through searching for meaning of the deaths of their children, bereaved parents arrived at a moment when they were able to realize God's will, Jesus' love, and they experienced growth of their faith and reorganized the purpose of their lives. From the experience, bereaved parents gained new perspectives. Distinctive changes in bereaved parents were to see people, their lives and the world through the lens of compassion. One super-ordinate theme *Significant Perspective Changes on Life and Death* related the way in which bereaved parents changed their priorities, attitudes, and understandings of life and people.

After these realizations and changes, bereaved parents followed their reappraised beliefs with a strong faith that God gave meaning to their lives in order that they would dedicate their lives to various missions. All interviewees involved in this benefit-making process committed their lives to their own missions whether or not they had gone through the process of sense making. This was described in the themes of *Testimony*, *Wounded Healer*, and *Encouraging People* under the super-ordinate theme of *Sharing Their Life Stories*. For bereaved parents, benefit making was the process that allowed them to

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<sup>186</sup> Park, 408.

accommodate the new situation, explore the new purpose and value of their lives, and make new efforts toward God-given missions.

Kang-Soo and Jane realized the value of life, and they spoke to people about their realizations by telling their life stories as a form of testimony and encouragement for the younger generation. Jane realized that life every day given to her was God's grace. She became more thankful and empathetic, and it motivated her to see and help people who were in the situations where they could not help themselves, particularly those who were depressed because she had been depressed for several years after the losses of two children. In addition, Jane began to focus more on raising her surviving children and the adopted child as a responsible mom. After obtaining clear understanding of the value of human life, Kang-Soo thought that speaking about the purpose of life to the younger generation was his duty and responsibility so that they could understand the relationship between life sufferings and trusting God.

Sung-Ho and Eunhee realized that they had reversed the order of their priorities and they reestablished those priorities. They put their realization into practice to commit themselves to the mission for American Indians by going to the Indian reservation once a week. Going beyond serving the mission, Sung-Ho thought that trying to practice God's love for his neighbors and patients is also mission work that God asked of him. Eunhee changed her attitudes toward her life and other people. She understood that earthly possessions did not belong to her, but God allowed them to her temporarily during her life on earth. She also extended her understanding about complicated human life so that she did not judge people's behaviors under circumstances of human hardships, particularly those who had committed suicide.

Brian and Sharon became more empathetic in understanding the suffering of other people. Brian had a better understanding when grieving parents considered divorce because in his own grieving process he had seriously thought about a divorce from his wife. Sharon gained deep understanding about God's grace and Jesus' love, and she realized the meaning of the phrase "wounded healer" when she had the chance to help another bereaved parent. Brian perceived his son's death as a way that God prepared him for his appointed task as a pastor that would give him the opportunity to help not only other bereaved parents but also sick and dying people. He has thought about becoming a chaplain to focus on his ministry of helping families and patients in critical situations.

For Yuna, one realization from the loss of her child was the importance of practicing God's love in daily life. For her, Tae-Min's death was a meaningful part of God's will. Yuna believed that no one would be willing to lay down one's life for a friend unless appointed by God to remind us of God's love as Jesus was. Yuna gave meaning to Tae-Min's death. As God planned, Tae-Min was in the place at the time when his friend needed to be saved from drowning. Tae-Min demonstrated Jesus' love for us on earth. Thus, for Yuna, practicing Jesus love is the most valuable task in her life.

Jisook believed that God prepared her for her son's death. She confessed that if she had lost her son when she was not following God obediently, the loss would have given her a greater shock and she would have been unable to cope with the loss. She learned that God's love is great through her grieving process. Jisook accepted Sam's death as God's preparation for her to have faith in God and bless her life. Thus, she actively engaged in church activities and shared her life stories with participants in a spiritual retreat program. Speaking her testimony about her life before and after her loss



enabled her to recollect her memories and arrange her thoughts about her relationship with God. In addition, in selecting her job, she made a choice to give herself to more valuable and meaningful work.

Doo-Hwan thought that his daughter's death was God's will to make him to repent of his dissipated life and turn to faith in God by taking his most valued and dear daughter. Since he accepted it, his life has been changed. Doo-Hwan decided to live his life faithfully in God. He attended every church worship service to show his sincerity to God and tried to accomplish something good in his life so that he will not be humiliated when he meets his daughter in Heaven. After he was changed, he was invited to a spiritual retreat as a guest speaker. He spoke to participants how God changed him after his loss. Doo-Hwan confessed that he has received many blessings from God in terms of health and wealth.

#### Re-authoring Their Stories from Narrative Perspectives

From a narrative perspective, life stories of each bereaved parent can be divided into three: pre-loss stories, problem-saturated stories and reconstructed stories. The loss of their child interrupted their family narrative and self-narrative plot. Their anticipated narratives broke down, destroying their hope and expectation. They faced situations in which they were unable to maintain their pre-loss narratives with a frightening sense of shock and confusion. In this complicated situation, their narratives could not be reshaped meaningfully. Thus, bereaved parents struggled to reconstruct their narratives and adjust to new situations while they searched for the meaning of their loss and their lives so that they could begin to revise their narratives. When the bereaved parents were able to attribute meaning to the loss and their altered lives, they began to change the focus of

their stories from grief and pain to healing and recovery. As the protagonist of their narratives, they became healers, dedicators, and helpers, and they were no longer pictured as grievors, complainers, and receivers in their story.

Seeing their situations from a constructive narrative theological perspective, narrative functions as a structuring experience, particularly in times of crisis, enabling people to “perceive new configurations between their experience and the sacred stories of their culture.”<sup>187</sup> From a narrative theological perspective, meaning is found when human stories are combined into God’s greater story. For bereaved parents, encountering God and the realization of God’s will and love provided them with a turning point to revise their problem-saturated story and incorporate it into their new narratives. From a narrative theological perspective, Stanley Hauerwas has found that human questions about suffering and tragedy can be understood when we recognize God’s living presence with people in a mutual story. Hauerwas states,

[I]f Christian convictions have any guidance to give us about how we are to understand as well as respond to suffering, it is by helping us discover that our lives are located in God’s narrative—the God who has not abandoned us even when we or someone we care deeply about is ill.<sup>188</sup>

‘Located in God’s narrative’ means that Christians are in God’s redemptive work shown through the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Thus, the story of human tragedies demands that Christians be faithful to God as they believe God has been faithful to them in the cross of Christ.<sup>189</sup> When bereaved parents encountered the moment of realization

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<sup>187</sup> Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward. *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM, 2005), 63.

<sup>188</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Naming the Silences: God, Medicine, and the Problem of Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 67.

<sup>189</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, “From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics,” in *Why Narrative?*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 190.

of God's presence, they found that God was with them and decided to live their lives faithfully. Then, their stories were incorporated into God's narrative.

Although there were no specific therapists or assistants, they were able to re-author their family and self narratives meaningfully following God's narrative. Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley indicate that people can see life events in the light of the presence of God when they admit the possibility that God is present in their daily lives. Then, human lives can be transformed by recognition of God's presence that pervades their narratives. Anderson and Foley states, "When we can acknowledge the possibility of God's presence in our daily living, it is possible for us to weave the divine narrative into the stories we fashion."<sup>190</sup> Anderson and Foley believed that weaving stories of the human and divine is ultimately "transformative and life-giving."<sup>191</sup>

Seen from this narrative theological perspective, bereaved parents are no longer the story-teller or constructor of their narratives alone, but God is the one who is able to help them to form their narratives meaningfully. That was the reason most bereaved parents stated that "God gave meaning," "God changed me," "God prepared for me," "God had a plan," and "God made me to do something." Thus, their stories became God's story. God began to be a co-author of their stories when the bereaved parents gave up their authority to be the sole writers of their stories. When bereaved parents faced God at the end of their search for the meaning of the loss and of their lives, they found they were not asked that question. Instead, bereaved parents recognized God as the ground of being who exists by Godself and beyond human thoughts.

Theologically speaking, bereaved parents participated in God, "being itself" and

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<sup>190</sup> Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 40.

<sup>191</sup> Anderson and Foley, 40.

“the ground of being” who transcends essence and existence and finitude and infinitude.<sup>192</sup> The only way human beings can overcome is to rely on God who exists beyond human finitude. The bereaved parents realized the limitation of our human existence before God. Paul Tillich asserts that human beings need to have courage to overcome the threat of non-being, and “the courage must be rooted in a power of being that is greater than the power of oneself and the power of one’s world.”<sup>193</sup> Bereaved parents admitted that they cannot ask God “Why?” and instead they accepted God as the power of being. That was God’s answer to their question for the problem of human finitude. Thus, bereaved parents confessed that “God is the Lord of the universe,” “God is creator and they are created,” and “God is beyond human thought and knowledge” when they faced God’s reality. For bereaved parents, this was the moment they began to combine their life story into God’s narrative. Figure 2 showed the process of change of the bereaved parents’ narratives.

Seeing this process from God’s narrative perspective, God desired the bereaved parents to become speakers who would tell the story of how God delivered them from their sufferings. Kang-Soo, Jane, Jisook, Doo-Hwan were invited to a spiritual retreat as guest speakers. They spoke about their lives before and after their losses and particularly the transcendental moments in which they encountered God in the midst of their grief. Kang-Soo was also used by God to tell the younger generation about the purpose of human life and sufferings; a task he perceived to be his responsibility. God used bereaved parents to spread God’s story of love and salvation to other people. In addition, God

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<sup>192</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 236-38.

<sup>193</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 51-52.

healed the bereaved parents by enabling them to recollect fragments of their memories and put them into the narratives so that they could maintain their personal stories within God's narrative.

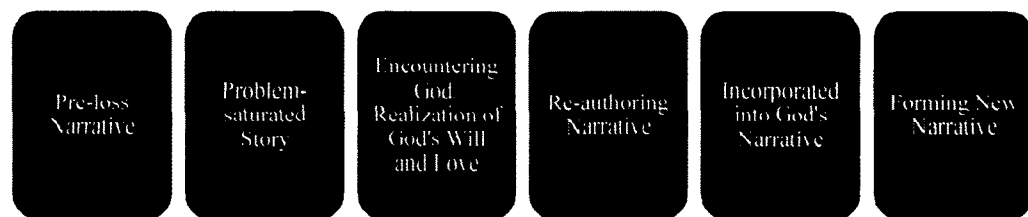


Figure 2 The Process of Change of Bereaved Parents' Narratives

In constructing their new narratives with God, the bereaved parents became healers. God sent them to those who were suffering from loss, sickness, depression, and poverty in order to comfort and heal them. God led Sung-Ho, Eunhee, Yuna, Jisook, Sharon, and Brian to bereaved parents to be with them and console them. In particular, God let Jane see the people who were suffering depression and to lead them to QT groups to be healed by reading God's Word and meditating on it. In addition, God sent Sung-Ho and Eunhee to provide American Indians with medical support. On the other hand, Yuna experienced a spiritual moment in which God's story of saving people through Jesus began to combine with her narrative. For Yuna, the story and event of Jesus is no longer

God's own story. Through Tae-Min's death, God's mission to save the lives of people was perceived by her as a command to practice it in her own life. All bereaved parents became main characters who felt called to undertake various roles of a healer, comforter, speaker, and helper in the coauthored narratives.

### Dialogue Between Ritual Theories and Feminist Theological Perspectives

In this section, I deal with the spiritual perspectives of bereaved parents. These spiritual perspectives will be incorporated into ritual theory and feminist theology. This section begins with an explanation of the relationship between rituals and spirituality. Then, from ritual theories and feminist liturgical perspectives, the function of ritual will be presented here as the power of transformation, comfort, healing, and remembrance. In these four main perspectives of ritual theory, bereaved parents' spiritual lives and their relationship with the deceased child will be explored. Then, I adopt images of God and Jesus from Korean feminist theology as a way to understand how bereaved parents perceived their faith in God and Jesus in the Korean church and culture. This section will also present an interpretation of the spiritual lives of bereaved parents.

### Ritual Theory and Spirituality

In Chapter 1, I discussed spirituality to understand the journeys of bereaved parents after the deaths of their children. I listed the characteristics of spirituality including the search for purpose and meaning in life, faith in ultimate being, community, religious beliefs and activities, experiencing spiritual reality, and transformation. Based on the discussion I defined Christian spirituality as: "a dynamic process that involves efforts to search for the meaning of life and the sacred moments that can be experienced

through Christian rituals and activities both within personal and community life, a process that enhances one's compassion for the self and others and that includes a relationship with the Trinity of God."

Spirituality as a dynamic and lived reality is experienced through rituals and activities in community and personal life. This indicates the importance of the relationship between spirituality and ritual. Ritual involves all intended human repeated and symbolic actions that can support spirituality.<sup>194</sup> As Dennis Klass indicates, spirituality help humans to understand their lives just as rituals are an integral part of human life.<sup>195</sup> For bereaved parents, encountering God was experienced by participating in worship, prayer, or meditation. They were connected to their community of faith by their attending church and participating in church activities. Seen from this perspective, spirituality needs certain actions to be experienced in a form of ritual. Spirituality cannot be understood without a relationship with ritual.

As Klass explored the spiritual lives of bereaved parents, he categorized the experience of spirituality, placing an emphasis on three characteristics that commonly appeared in bereaved parents: having an encounter with transcendent reality, finding a worldview that gives meaning, and becoming involved in community.<sup>196</sup> In particular, he emphasized the community membership in which one's ideas of the transcendent and a worldview are validated. In community, members can provide higher spiritual levels of

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<sup>194</sup> Ronald Grimes understands ritual to include all socially formalized actions such as shaking hands, greetings, and kissing, which people expect each other to do in daily life. Grimes includes in the mode of ritual not only official ceremonies, public and private celebrations such as carnivals, parties, dancing, and singing, but also religious liturgy and magical actions in the mode of ritual. See: Ronald Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, rev. ed. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 44-53.

<sup>195</sup> Dennis Klass, *The Spiritual Lives of Bereaved Parents* (Philadelphia: Bruner/Mazel, 1999), 21.

<sup>196</sup> Klass, 21.

care, and religious ideas, prayer and ritual are the vehicles in which bereaved parents find solace and spiritual relationship with their deceased child. As the findings of this study show, some bereaved parents indicated that being a Christian itself was helpful because they received prayers from members of the church. After the funeral service, when Doo-Hwan visited the church of the pastor who had visited him, Doo-Hwan was touched by a member who prayed for Lisa and comforted by the pastor's message in the worship service.

In addition, engaging in church activities and attending worship services helped bereaved parents work through their grief and maintain their spiritual relationship with God. They experienced sacred and healing moments when they helped other bereaved parents in their faith communities. After realization of God's will and love, their reshaped life purposes and values were validated by participating in activities including worship, Bible study, volunteer services, and missions. Jisook stressed that she intentionally participated in every activity that the church held, which allowed her to become one with the body of the church and helped her to be healed. Thus, the spiritual lives of bereaved parents are deeply related to certain forms of ritual that provides them with transformation of their lives, moments of healing and a continuing bond with their deceased child.

#### Understanding the Function of Ritual in the Spiritual Journey

When people encounter a specific situation in which they must change and take steps forward, they are longing to find a way of getting through it. Tom Driver indicates that rituals provide people in crisis with comfort, transformation, and healing so they are able to move forward to other levels. Thus, Driver states that "to lose ritual is to lose the



way,” and “to ritualize is to make a pathway.”<sup>197</sup> As Van Gennep explains rites of passage, the purpose of rituals is to allow people to make a safe journey and be restored to a normal life. Thus, rituals allow people to continue their lives and guide their way when they are in darkness. In particular, rituals are frequently performed in anticipation of death and near the time of death. Upon hearing of a terminal illness, people tend to look for a refuge that provides comfort and resilience. Connecting with their religious faith and engaging in rituals can bring relief.

For bereaved parents, particularly those whose child has been diagnosed with a terminal illness, ritual and symbolic actions can offer the comfort and strength that enable them to actively care for their child; to move beyond the period of being anxious and confused as they were in the hospital where they had nothing to do except be there with their child and pray. Jane desperately sought help from pastors to visit and pray for her children because she believed that, in addition to medical treatment, prayer would cure her children. After the loss of her children, she felt hopeless and helpless with depression. Repeatedly going to church gave her opportunities to meet God and know God’s love and care.

Prayer and support from the members of their churches comforted bereaved parents and made them feel they were not alone. When Jisook took care of her son in the hospital, she received various kinds of support from her pastor and members of the church. The pastor provided worship services at the bedside of the hospital, and members prayed for Jisook’s son and put encouraging Bible verses around the wall in the room. In addition, Jisook made notes of her everyday conversations with her son, her prayers, and feelings when she was in the hospital. This spiritual diary helped her stay in touch with

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<sup>197</sup> Driver, 4, 16.

her own feelings and with God. These kinds of support and actions helped Jisook while she took care of her son.

When death finally occurs, the funeral signifies the finality of death. Without the funeral ritual, the person's death cannot be recognized as an actual death publicly and personally. Grieving parents may want to deny the reality of their child's death. The function of the funeral service is to mark the death of a child as a finality and to give hope of meeting the child in Heaven. It assists bereaved parents to step forward to other levels.

On the other hand, whether the ritual was publicly or privately celebrated, it carried a transformational power. Driver well recognizes the function of ritual as transformation, stating that "rituals are primarily instruments designed to change a situation."<sup>198</sup> Driver believes that ritual brings about some changes in an existing state of affairs such as status and identity. Kenneth Doka emphasizes that ritual is extremely important in times of tragedy, illness, and death in terms of its power of healing and transformation.<sup>199</sup> Doka sees the ritual as a therapeutic intervention and powerful tool for facilitating bereavement. Pamela Baird describes three functions of rituals.<sup>200</sup> First, rituals provide connection to the moment, ourselves, nature, and the Sacred. Second, rituals can be a link to finding meaning in times of pain and suffering. Third, rituals can bring about physical, psychological, and spiritual transformation.

In particular, in the previous section, I explained bereaved parents' experiences

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<sup>198</sup> Driver, 93.

<sup>199</sup> Kenneth J. Doka, "The Spiritual Crisis of Bereavement," in *Death and Spirituality*, eds. Kenneth J. Doka and John Morgan (Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing, 1993), 188.

<sup>200</sup> Pamela Baird, "The Role of Ritual at the End of Life," in *Living with Grief: Spirituality and End-of-Life Care*, ed. Kenneth J. Doka and Amy S. Tucci (Washington, DC: Hospice Foundation of America, 2011), 65.

based on meaning-making theory and narrative therapy as the process of a spiritual journey to find meaning in the loss and in their own lives. There were important spiritual moments in which bereaved parents encountered God or faced God that occurred between the processes of sense making and benefit making. Realization of God's will and love also influenced their narratives and the opportunity to admit God to re-create their narratives. Bereaved parents' experiences can be divided into three phases: struggle to find meaning, the moment of realization, and change. This process can be applied to the structure of ritual that Arnold van Gennep established.

Van Gennep presented the structure of ritual as the process of separation, transition, and incorporation in *The Rites of Passage*.<sup>201</sup> These phases of ritual process can be related to bereaved parents' experiences as I divided them into three phases. Separation occurred when bereaved parents lost their child. In an early stage of the loss, they experienced separation from the relationship with the child, self, the world, and God with a sense of shock and confusion. Transition came along with spiritual experiences when they realized God's will and love. This is a sacred moment and a turning point at which bereaved parents found new perspectives of their lives and decided to live their lives faithfully in God. Incorporation is the stage of the process at which the bereaved are able to apply the insights they have gained to activities that reflect their new values.

Likewise, the structure of ritual explains the spiritual journey of bereaved parents in a proper way. Van Gennep's theory of ritual structure has influenced many social scientists, anthropologists, and psychologists who recognized the important function of ritual transition. In particular, Victor Turner places special focus on the phase of transition.

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<sup>201</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Manika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 11.

He sees ritual as a redressive activity that plays a fundamental role in personal and social life. At the heart of Turner's theory, ritual is a means of transforming existing social-structural relations. Ritual's anti-structure responds to the need to transcend the limitations of structure and to create alternative personal and social arrangements by temporarily generating *liminality* and *communitas*.<sup>202</sup>

Both *liminality* and *communitas* occur during the liminal or transition phase of the ritual process. *Liminality* refers to an experience of a sacred moment that marks changes in a group's or individual's social status, while *communitas* creates a bond and an experience of being harmonized among people.<sup>203</sup> It is a new encounter between themselves and reality that engages a situation from a new point of view. Bereaved parents experienced this moment when they cried out to God, prayed to God, read the Bible, and meditated on it. This sacred moment was encountered mostly in an unexpected time and place, but for all it was a situation in which they felt God's presence with them. Bereaved parents experienced changes when they met God in a spiritual moment.

Eunhee heard God's voice when she prayed to God in her car on the way church asking why God took her son. For her, it was an awakening moment that she understood everything she did not understand as she said, "That was an unquestionable and undeniable touch from God." Jane also heard God's voice when she cried out to God in the midst of her deep pain. In the moment, she could not help throwing herself down and crying her heart out, and felt she was being surrounded by warm air. Jane called this moment "experience of the Holy Spirit." After these experiences, both Eunhee and Jane

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<sup>202</sup> Victor Turner, *The Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes Among the Ndembu of Zambia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1981), 39.

<sup>203</sup> Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 273.

stopped asking God why. Instead, they had more faith in God and committed their lives to the mission of God.

Viewed from a feminist liturgical perspective, crying out to God in deep grief is important to bereaved parents. Walton mentions silence and lament as “partners in the struggle towards truth.”<sup>204</sup> Procter-Smith states that truthful transformation occurs when people dialogue with God in various forms of language including silence or speech, song, prayer and gesture.<sup>205</sup> In healing rites, silence and lament are necessary in that we can be silent in the face of serious danger, of a hurting experience, of a story of violence in the life of a woman but able to cry out in some moment of the rite. Silent time provides them creative space to dream and imagine while people cry and express the experience of violence, pain, and suffering with voice and body. Both silence and lament are the source of communication with God. In the Old Testament, Israelites frequently cried out to God in their sufferings, and God heard their voices.

Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave. (Psalm 107:19-20)

Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak. (Psalm 31:9-10)

In my distress I called to the LORD; I called out to my God. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came to his ears. (2 Samuel 22:7)

When bereaved parents cried out to God in the midst of pain and grief, God’s presence was with them, and God met them to listen to them and heal them. The voice of the

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<sup>204</sup> Janet Walton, *Feminist Liturgy: A Matter of Justice* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 40.

<sup>205</sup> Marjorie Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite: Constructing Feminist Liturgical Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 48-49.

human who cries to God for help reflects that they are in the midst of injustice and suffering. Lament is not just the voice of pain, but it is the voice of prayer directed toward God to seek justice and healing. Lament is an intentional process of assisting people to appropriately relinquish and mourn what they have lost. Thus, the lament offers a holy resource to people who are suffering extreme trauma, pain, and loss.

### Healing from Feminist Liturgical Perspectives

Feminist liturgy began with women's realization that ordained male clergy have performed the most significant rituals in churches, and these men have dominated rituals that have made women invisible by excluding women's presence, voice and experience.<sup>206</sup> Rosemary Ruether argues that clericalism is built upon patriarchy and many have abused liturgies by transforming them into a clerical power tool and alienating people from sacramental life.<sup>207</sup> Thus, feminist theologians have stressed the importance of women's ordination and participation in liturgy in order to establish a fully authentic human life and relationship with God. Procter-Smith emphasizes the restoration of women's memories that will allow women to reclaim and reconstruct the liturgy that has been dominated and ritualized by patriarchy.

Ruether also states that rituals can be reshaped and improved upon within every individual and community environment because they need to be contextualized in accordance with space, time, and person.<sup>208</sup> Ruether introduces diverse rituals for moments of crisis and healing, including such rites of healing from particular occasions

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<sup>206</sup> Walton, 26.

<sup>207</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985), 76-78.

<sup>208</sup> Ruether, 6.

of violence and crisis including miscarriage and abortion, battering and rape, and exorcisms of patriarchal language and misogyny from the Christian tradition and the scriptures.<sup>209</sup> Ruether illustrates these healing rituals in *Women-Church*.<sup>210</sup> The purpose of the rituals is to emancipate and empower women and all those who have been marginalized.

It is interesting that the healing rites are performed in circles or half-circles holding hands. Circles symbolize not only the equality of all participants and the immanence of divinity, but also the unlimited source of life and the protection of the person who needs to be healed in these rituals. In addition, every participant supports a person offering a fervent prayer for the healing of the person and gives space for the person to be silent or cry out. There are no observers. Everyone participates in these rites. These rites involve some specific symbols, actions, prayers, and words. In particular, symbolic actions include baptizing, watering a new plant, and changing one's name. Water is an important part of symbolic action for it is representative of new birth and life. Then, the ritual space becomes a distinctive space from ordinary life. As Turner says, it is liminal space in which participants can experience *communitas*. Throughout the ritual, healing occurs for all participants.

Driver emphasizes the importance of creativity of ritual and the use of symbolic actions. In particular, funeral rituals are enhanced by being personalized. An individualized funeral is more likely to facilitate grief adjustment.<sup>211</sup> The life of the deceased is often reviewed through funeral eulogies or homilies. Prayers, readings, music

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<sup>209</sup> Ruether, 108-09.

<sup>210</sup> Ruether, 149-81.

<sup>211</sup> Doka, "Spiritual Crisis of Bereavement," 187.

can be selected for their special relevance to the deceased.<sup>212</sup> In addition, the use of symbols including objects, photographs, clothing, instruments, sounds, and words that carry meaning and connection to the sacred and the deceased make the ritual more effective and creative. It also validates the community's relationship with the deceased, provokes memories of experiences, and helps construct meaning.

For bereaved parents, a well-designed funeral service in terms of place and content provides bereaved parents with comfort and a sense of the sacred at the moment. Jisook felt the funeral was meaningful to her and her son when the funeral was performed in the main sanctuary of her church where it was decorated with beautiful Christmas trees and decorations. Jisook felt that she was treated as VIP and her son would be in peace when he saw the beautiful service. Eunhee appreciated her pastor for creating a poem and her friend who was announcer of a broadcasting station who came from another state to attend the funeral and recite the poem. Jane was comforted by her EM pastor's invitation to help design the funeral. The pastor asked her about what hymns and the Bible verses the child liked, and she felt thankful for his visiting and asking.

However, Driver indicates that the liturgy performed in the church has lost its power of healing and transformation, often becoming mere show.<sup>213</sup> Jane mentioned that a conventional ritual did not touch her. When Jane asked KM (Korean Ministry) pastors to visit the hospital, she expected extraordinary prayers, words and actions from them. However, it turned out that there was only a conventional worship service. Although she appreciated pastors' prayers and being with her family, she was somewhat disappointed because she was eager to know answers and expected a special ritual from Korean pastors.

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<sup>212</sup> Doka, "Spiritual Crisis of Bereavement," 187.

<sup>213</sup> Driver, 95.



On the contrary, Jane mentioned a heart-warming moment. One day, the EM pastor appeared in the room of the hospital saying “I am stopping by to sing a song for you.” He sang the song “We shall overcome someday,” and briefly prayed for her and the child and left. Jane said, “even now I clearly remember his singing and how much it touched me.”

In androcentric liturgy, Korean pastors tend to provide worship service following a traditional form of worship no matter what situation they face. However, it is emphasized in feminist liturgy that the pastor needs to creatively construct a ritual in a different context. It does not mean to merely change the message of the sermon or number of the hymn book, but to consider the persons, components, symbolic actions that will create an appropriate and meaningful ritual in accordance with the specific situation. In addition, a sincere relational touch is important. Jane invited pastors to the anniversary service of the death of her children for the first three years. However, she did not feel that she needed to keep the anniversary ritual since the KM pastor retired and the EM pastor transferred to another church.

On the other hand, liturgical anamnesis is important from a feminist perspective. Procter-Smith asserts that liturgical anamnesis and imagination are required in constructing a feminist liturgy that understands the past and envisions the future.<sup>214</sup> Anamnesis means not merely recalling the past, but it takes effect in the event here and now. People relive the event by remembering a person’s life, and trying to live the way that person would have lived. In the Bible, the root of anamnesis comes from Jesus’ words at the Last Supper, “Do this in memory of me.” (Luke 22:19, NIV) The word memory is anamnesis in Greek. The meaning of anamnesis in this verse is remembering Jesus’ whole life; how Jesus acted, spoke, and thought. Thus, cherishing the memory of a

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<sup>214</sup> Procter-Smith, 25.

deceased person means not only remembering the positive features of his or her life but also refreshing the bereaved individuals' own lives for today. As a way of looking to the resurrection, rituals of remembrance can also be seen as expressing a hope for meeting again, as the bereaved parents are looking forward to seeing their children in Heaven.

As seen from the super-ordinate theme of *Remembering the Child*, bereaved parents have maintained a spiritual bond with their child in different ways. They treasured the memory of the child, and appreciated God for being mom of the child. Bereaved parents thought that the deceased child was a gift given from God. They found solace from their memories of the child. Sometimes, they talked about the child with families and friends remembering the bright side of the child's life. They even shared the memory of the child with a child born after the loss. Some bereaved parents watched videos that were recorded of family events with the child, and they saw pictures to remind them of their child. For bereaved parents, the memories of the dead child can be a part of their ongoing personal lives.

Allan Hugh Cole explains ways of keeping memories of the life of a loved one as the concept of "sojourning," which means "visiting or spending time somewhere."<sup>215</sup> Cole suggests five aspects of good mourning that helps bereaved individuals to get through their losses: receiving, enduring, adapting, relocating, and sojourning. To invoke memories of the life of loved one, bereaved individuals need to spend time alone with "a leisurely walk," "sitting in a quiet place," "going for a long drive," "visiting a grave site," "looking at pictures," and "Scripture reading."<sup>216</sup> These activities of sojourning can assist bereaved parents to maintain their relationship with their death child.

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<sup>215</sup> Cole, 56.

<sup>216</sup> Cole, 56.

In addition, sojourning with the loss ties the family together. Some bereaved parents have visited their child's grave on a regular basis since the child was buried. Although they believed that the child was not in the grave, but in Heaven, they still missed and wanted to remember the child. It became a family ritual to cherish the memory of the child by visiting the cemetery on special days, including the birthday, Thanksgiving, Easter, Christmas, and the anniversary day of the death. For Sung-Ho's family, they visited the lake from time to time where they had spread cremated ashes to remember Chan-Min. When Sung-Ho and his daughter hiked a mountain, his daughter named a peak of the mountain top as Chan-Min's peak to remember him. Moreover, a memorial service on the anniversary day of the death at home or graveyard helped bereaved parents and families come together and share their memories of the child. Bereaved parents were consoled by the ritual, feeling the family bonding together and continuing their bond with the child.

As Klass indicates, parents' bond with a dead child is maintained not only in ritual but also by means of an inner representation. Bereaved parents believed that they are spiritually connected with their deceased child. From the spiritual aspects of the parent-child bond, Klass stresses:

The parent-child relationship is the most common symbol for the relationship between humans and the divine. In their bond with their child, parents feel connected to transcendent reality and the defining values of the society.<sup>217</sup>

As bereaved parents gave meanings to their lives after the loss, the child is the reason and mediation to live their lives sincerely in relation to God. They related their bond with the child to looking forward to meeting their child in Heaven. Although Klass sees that bereaved parents connect the bond with their child to an inner representation, such as

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<sup>217</sup> Klass, 42.

seeing the child like an angel or a saint, and linking objects,<sup>218</sup> it is difficult to apply it to interviewees. Interviewees emphasized the spiritual connection with the dead child more on the belief that the child lives in Heaven. For them, Heaven is the place where their child is, and so they must go to Heaven after their own death to meet him or her. That is why Doo-Hwan said,

*I realized that I needed to live sincerely before God and try to do something good so that I could go to Heaven. To see my daughter Lisa I decided to live without even a speck of shameful behaviors in order not to be humiliated when I face my daughter in Heaven.*

Klass states that the inner representation of the child as being in heaven is grasped by some bereaved parents in the early stage of the grieving process. For bereaved parents, the idea of Heaven functions as “the bond with the child in heaven” and “the hope of reunion.”<sup>219</sup> This comforts bereaved parents and makes them feel connected with the child in the world. Klass states, “The child in heaven remains the child in the heart. Heaven is *out there* and for bereaved parents it is also *in here*. In more proper theological language, it is both transcendent and immanent.”<sup>220</sup>

### Comforting from Korean Feminist Perspectives

In the previous section, I interpreted bereaved parents’ experiences from perspectives of ritual and feminist liturgy, which brought about transformation and healing. Particularly, rituals offered bereaved parents safe voyage to make a path so as to get through their grief. Creatively formalized rituals provided them with solace, and ritualized memories of the dead child gave them meaning. Seen from a spiritual perspective, the spiritual lives of bereaved parents were connected to their understanding

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<sup>218</sup> Klass, 51.

<sup>219</sup> Klass, 107.

<sup>220</sup> Klass, 107.

of a Christian worldview, a concept of community, and a perception of the Divine. In this section, I explore what image of the Divine and Jesus assisted bereaved parents in coping with their grief from the perspective of Korean feminist theology.

All Interviewees are Korean immigrants. They have attended Korean church and shared Korean culture. Although they have lived in the USA on average 25 years, their faith and belief reflect Korean theological perspectives that developed from the basis of Korean culture and history. In particular, Koreans live in a multi-religious culture and all religious traditions have developed on the ground of Korean traditional thoughts and beliefs that convey collective experiences of Korean history. Thus, it is necessary to reflect on the experiences of bereaved parents in light of Korean theological perspectives in order to understand the Christian faith of bereaved parents.

Korean feminist theology is deeply rooted in women's experience of *Han*. *Han* is an emotion that is peculiar to Korean people as "a sense of unresolved resentment," "sense of helplessness," and "a feeling of acute pain of sorrow."<sup>221</sup> Korean feminist theology shares many aspects with Korean *Minjung* theology. *Minjung* literally means people. However, it indicates specific groups of people who have experienced suffering under economic exploitation, socio-cultural discrimination, political oppression, and patriarchal domination.<sup>222</sup> In both Korean *Minjung* theology and feminist theology, Jesus is understood as the liberator of *Han*.

Throughout Korean history, women have been the target of oppression and exploitation. In traditional society, Korean women have been invisible, voiceless, and

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<sup>221</sup> Hyun Kyung Chung, "'Han-pu-ri': Doing Theology from Korean Women's Perspective," in *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women*, eds. Virginia Fabella and Sun Ai Lee Park (Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 1989), 138.

<sup>222</sup> Chung, "Han-pu-ri," 138-39.

nameless although their roles have been important in managing large extended families.<sup>223</sup> Moreover, during World War II, Japan forcibly took poor young Korean women to provide “comfort” to Japanese troops.<sup>224</sup> After the war (1945), Korea was forcibly divided into two nations while under the control of two dominant countries: The USA and the Soviet Union. The two nations were further ruined during the Korean War (1950-1953). Thus, up to the 1970s, Korean people suffered extreme poverty. People were longing to be rich, and women went to work in factories undergoing poor working conditions, low wages, and sexual abuse.

Coming from this background, the Korean Association of Women Theologians (KAWT) was founded in 1980. Since then, Korean feminist theology has been actively working to establish human rights for women.<sup>225</sup> Not only did the group criticize the patriarchal theology and androcentric clericalism of the church, but it has been concerned to bring about social equality and justice beyond the church community. KAWT has been involved in various activities for the “communal transformation of all women’s liberation” such as the women workers’ movement, the peace and reunification movement, demonstrations for the comfort women, and so forth.<sup>226</sup> Along with the development of *Minjung* theology, Korean feminist theologians adopted the concept of *Minjung* who are the poor, oppressed and the marginalized in society. Korean feminist theologians saw

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<sup>223</sup> Eun Ok Jeong and Yolanda Dreyer, “Female Visibility through Korean Literature: Feminist Theological Critique,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 59, no. 2 (2003): 453.

<sup>224</sup> Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, *The Jesus of Asian Women* (Maryknoll NY.: Orbis Books, 2006), 84-85.

<sup>225</sup> Chunja Yoo, “A Feminist Liberation Spirituality Toward Communal Transformation for National Reunification-Jubilee in Korea,” in *Breaking Silence: Theology from Asian Women*, ed. Meehyun Chung (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2006), 103.

<sup>226</sup> Yoo, 107.

women as *Minjung of Minjung*. In addition, they raised issues about the female characteristics of God and Jesus from the perspective of the Korean situation.

Korean feminist theologians have criticized the image of a Father God, which has merged with images within the Korean patriarchal hierarchical culture. Korean Christianity has lifted up the image of God as Father, forcing women to imprint the patriarchal image of God in their minds.<sup>227</sup> Father God has spoken to women the way that men speak to women in Korean patriarchal culture, reinforcing the power men have over women. For that reason it is difficult for Korean women to imagine a father God who understands and listens to them because Korean fathers are strict, hierarchal, suppressive and uncommunicative.<sup>228</sup> Thus, Korean feminists re-imagined God from the traditional patriarchal images of father to that of a family God within their cultural contexts. God, who is living in the family, shares their poverty, suffering, and oppression as wife, sister, and daughter.<sup>229</sup> God is always there in the midst of their daily lives. Discovering this God in their life crises empowered them to endure and transform their situation with hope.<sup>230</sup>

This image of God is applicable to bereaved parents, particularly bereaved mothers. Just as Korean women experienced God's solace when they cried out with their unresolved wounds, God suffered together when bereaved parents suffered under the pain of the loss of their child. God understood their pain and grief weeping with them and being with them. God heard their crying and spoke to them with comforting words. God was also found in the spouse's pain. As Brian and Sharon spoke, God allowed them to

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<sup>227</sup> Hee An Choi, "Re-Imagining Theological Reflection on God from the Context of Korean Women," *Feminist Theology* 16, no. 3 (2008): 354.

<sup>228</sup> Choi, 355.

<sup>229</sup> Choi, 356.

<sup>230</sup> Choi, 357.

see each other's pain, and God's pain was shown in each spouse's pain. For bereaved parents, God dwelled in their family so as to comfort them and their surviving children. Bereaved parents communicated with God as if God were right there with them. When they prayed to God, God responded and helped them realize things they had not figured out. God was depicted as being closely related to the bereaved parents.

In addition, bereaved parents perceived God's image through Jesus. For them, God is also a bereaved parent who understands the same pain. Sharon strongly empathized with God's pain as being like the pain she felt with the loss of her son. She asked how much pain God felt when Jesus was crucified on the Cross and died. When Jane meditated on John 3:16, she realized that when God gave Jesus, it was all that God had, while she still had half of her children. From a feminist theological perspective, Jesus is characterized as One who brings healing and transformation. In the New Testament, Jesus' ministry is not only to restore life to those who died, but also to heal their wounded hearts to lead them to a holistic life. Jesus is identified with "the presence of God's healing and redemptive power."<sup>231</sup> Yuna experienced a moment when she felt Jesus' pain as her own and love as the first virtue for a Christian to practice. The realization of Jesus' sacrifice to save people's lives had great meaning for her and brought comfort to her because Yuna's son died to save his friend from drowning.

Within Korean Christianity, it is important to be Jesus-like to become a true Christian. Jesus is not only the object of worship, but Jesus is also the one who lives among them. Korean *Minjung* women are able to find Jesus in their lives. They see Jesus in their work places, wearing a factory worker's uniform as a laborer who is there to help

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<sup>231</sup> Ruether, 149.



them.<sup>232</sup> They find Jesus in their fellow workers who endure hard work and humiliation, yet share their love and resources with other workers. They welcome Jesus as their friend who understands their suffering, suffers with them, works with them, and strengthens them as they seek freedom from all kinds of oppression. Seen from this perspective, Korean Christians are familiar with the idea of “being there” with people who suffer, weep, and who experience any trouble.

In Korean society, “being there” is an important virtue. For example, every funeral lasts three days from the day of the death to the third day when the burial service takes place. In these periods, the normal daily lives of the bereaved family stop. Mourners stay with the dead person three days and two nights, and their relatives and close friends also remain with the bereaved family day and night. They have to wake up because visitors come to show respect to the dead and comfort the family at any time of the day or night. Part of Korean culture is to participate in the pain of the bereaved family. Being there with them is offered to comfort the bereaved family. For Korean Christians, the meaning that Jesus is with them when they grieve can be understood more concretely just as close friends participate in their sorrow, comfort them, and stay with them day and night.

Some bereaved parents in this study experienced situations in which they had to comfort other bereaved parents. They believe that only bereaved parents are fully able to understand the pain of other bereaved parents. For Sharon, it came naturally to have a talk with a bereaved parent in her workplace. Easily empathizing with the coworker, she listened to the colleague and both women felt healing in that moment with each other. Crying with them and being with them, bereaved parents realized that they were wounded

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<sup>232</sup> Orevillo-Montenegro, 94.

healers. Because bereaved parents have gone through the deepest pain among other human pains, their presence and sharing their experience were enough to touch and heal not only other bereaved parents but also people who were suffering other kinds of hardship. Now, they have authority and feel a responsibility to share their stories with others to encourage them. Klass indicates,

The sense of sharing pain is summed up by a phrase that continually reoccurs in members' accounts of what they need from people: "just being there." 'Being there' means 'being with the parent' in a way that the reality of the child's death and the reality of the pain are not the parent's alone. They say the only people who can really understand are other bereaved parents, for they have been there.<sup>233</sup>

As bereaved parents believed that Jesus was with them, they wanted to be there with people who were sorrowful, depressive, and crying. For Yuna, that is one way to practice Jesus' love. When I asked Kang-Soo what he would like to say to other bereaved parents, he said, "There is nothing to say to bereaved parents, but if I have to say something, I would like to say, 'Jesus is right beside you.'" Korean feminist theologians connected the image of Jesus to an image of a mother. Just as mothers weep when they see their son's or daughter's pain, "Jesus cried out for the pain of suffering humanity."<sup>234</sup> Lee Oo Chung asserts that only people who experience sacrifice can understand pain, which means that the redemption of humankind comes from Jesus who actually suffered and shared the suffering of all humankind.<sup>235</sup> Sharon spoke about a gospel song that helped her to get through the loss of her son:

I love my Jesus. I love you so much.  
I love you my Jesus. I love you and that is all.  
I love you my son, I know you well.  
I love you my daughter, I bless your life.

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<sup>233</sup> Klass, 68

<sup>234</sup> Hyun Kyung Chung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 64.

<sup>235</sup> Chung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again*, 65.

Third and fourth lines are what Jesus says to bereaved parents; I love you my son. I know you and your pain well. I love my daughter. I bless your life. For all bereaved parents, that was the message they received, heard, experienced, and those were the words that encouraged them through their grieving process.

## CHAPTER 6 NORMATIVE TASK: IMPLICATION FOR PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELING

In Chapter 5, I discussed findings that emerged from dialogues between theories from the social sciences and from theology. In this Chapter, I will integrate the interpretive results into a plan of pastoral care and counseling for bereaved parents so as to offer what the Christian church should do and be in taking care of bereaved parents. The first work of this chapter is to explicate the meaning of their experiences in moving through their grief. From integrative works, I will explain the factors that influenced their spiritual journeys and lives, leading them toward God-centered healing and transformation. Second, I will provide perspectives on pastoral care ministry for bereaved parents.

### God-centered Healing and Transformation

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand the meaning of parental grief and the role of Christian spirituality in coping with the loss so that this deeper understanding can be applied to pastoral care and counseling. In recent literature, many scholars have offered theories and strategies that come from diverse areas of grief study in order to take care of bereaved parents. In particular, psychologists and counselors began to emphasize the role of spirituality/religiosity that helped bereaved individuals cope with their grief. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, they researched the role of spirituality/religiosity combining meaning-making theory, attachment theory, and continuing bond theory. From the results of their research, they explicated spiritual/religious factors that influenced bereaved parents in the grieving process including religious beliefs and practices, beliefs in after-life, religious affiliation and

attendance, community supports, rituals, and so on.

However, as seen from this literature review of pastoral theology on the subject of grief, many pastoral theologians seem to reflect on psychological theories to a greater or lesser degree in their study of grief with a theological interpretation, and each study places a different emphasis on the grief phenomenon. Pastoral theologians also extracted important factors of Christian spirituality from the grieving process including community, rituals, beliefs, faith, membership, worship, Scripture reading, serving others, prayer, and funeral. The theological studies seem to produce the same result as the psychological studies. I appreciate the effort of psychologists in providing pastoral theologians with considerable insights for grief study, but pastoral theologians need to expend more effort to develop their own psychological perspectives so as to create an effective pastoral theology of grief. In particular, few works of literature dealing with parental grief have been written specifically for pastoral theology. This has resulted in a serious lack of resources for pastoral ministry.

The loss of a child is the most difficult experience parents endure. They need resources that will enable them to cope with their grief and to accommodate them to the painful circumstance of living without the child. Facing this tragic event, bereaved parents are shocked and numbed and, initially, most are unable to handle the situation. For Christian bereaved parents, God seems to fail in justice, benevolence, and love. Most of my interviewees complained to God, asking how God could take their child at this young age. The search for meaning of the death of their child and their own lives is a necessary process for bereaved parents as they try to adjust to the loss.

From the data analysis, I identified seven themes in bereaved parents' experiences,

and these were put into discussion with diverse perspectives. From the first dialogue between meaning-making theory and narrative perspectives, I explained bereaved parents' spiritual journey of finding meaning and the process by which they changed their perspectives on God, the world, and people. A second dialogue focused on the spiritual lives of bereaved parents drawing on spirituality, rituals and feminist theological perspectives.

As the findings of the study indicate, spiritual factors that helped bereaved parents cope with the loss of the child included support from their faith community, searching for meaning of the death and their lives, encountering God, continuous participation in worship and activities, beliefs in heaven and afterlife, rituals, and family. Figure 3 shows factors of Christian spirituality that have assisted bereaved parents in coping with the loss of their child.

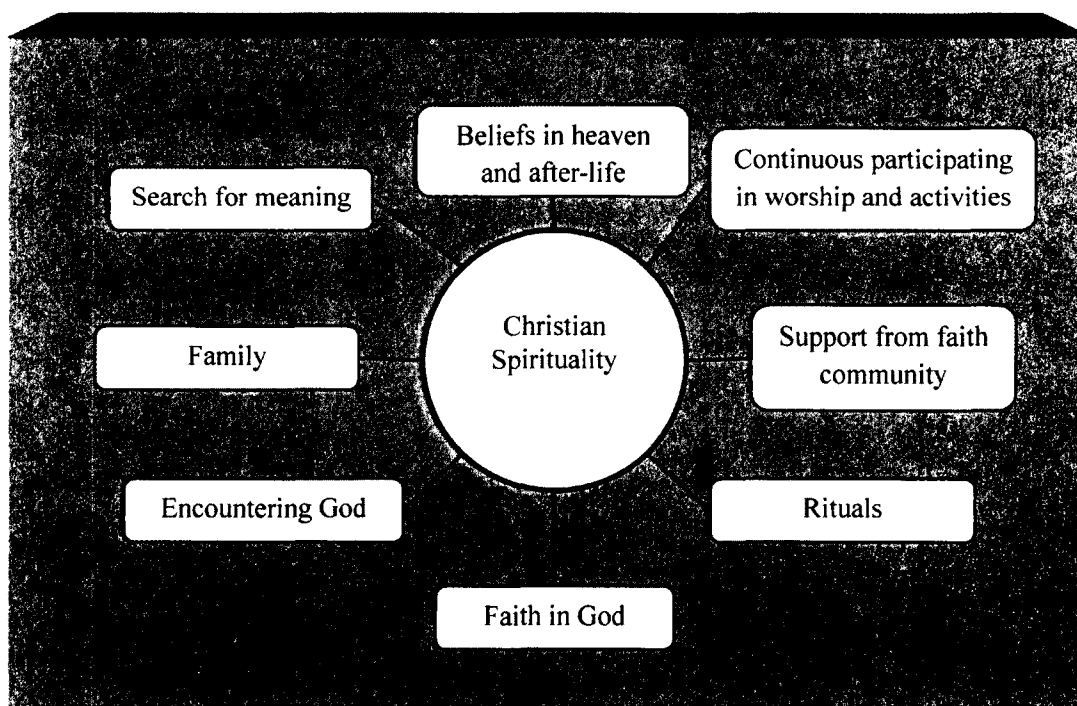


Figure 3 Factors of Christian spirituality

Christian spirituality provides bereaved parents with remarkable support, healing, and transformation as they move through the grieving process. On the other hand, from the interpretations of bereaved parents' spiritual journey and spiritual lives, I found their underlying 'faith in God' to be the foremost factor that helped bereaved parents move through their grief process. Sooner or later, they come to realize that faith in God is their most helpful resource in coping with their grief, particularly in the process of meaning-making and re-authoring their stories.

From experiencing the dynamic factors of Christian spirituality, bereaved parents realized God's love, will, grace, and plan for them, and this realization fortified their faith in God, giving them the courage to take a step further. In other words, these spiritual factors functioned to strengthen their faith in God. Faith in God is not only one of the spiritual factors that can assist bereaved parents in coping, but it can also be the grounding factor for building their future. Throughout the spiritual journey and lives of bereaved parents, they experienced healing and transformation as they realized that God dominated their lives and the universe. Thus, faith in God became the center of grieving parents' Christian spirituality. Figure 4 shows the spiritual journey and lives of bereaved parents toward God-centered healing and transformation.

As seen from figure 4, six spiritual factors that surround the center were experienced although not by all bereaved parents and in some cases the factors had different focuses. These variable factors include search for meaning; encountering God; continuous participation in worship and activities; support from faith community including food and care, prayers and being with them; rituals such as funeral, worship,

prayer, Bible, visiting the cemetery; family involving spouse, surviving child, and child born after the loss. Each of these factors can be replaced by another, and other spiritual factors can be added to them. For example, belief in after-life can be added as a variable factor. Some bereaved parents emphasized their belief in Heaven believing that God is taking good care of their child in Heaven. Although one factor is added or replaced, the lives of bereaved parents can still be explained as a spiritual journey. However, without faith in God as a fixed factor, it is difficult to understand their spiritual journey and lives.

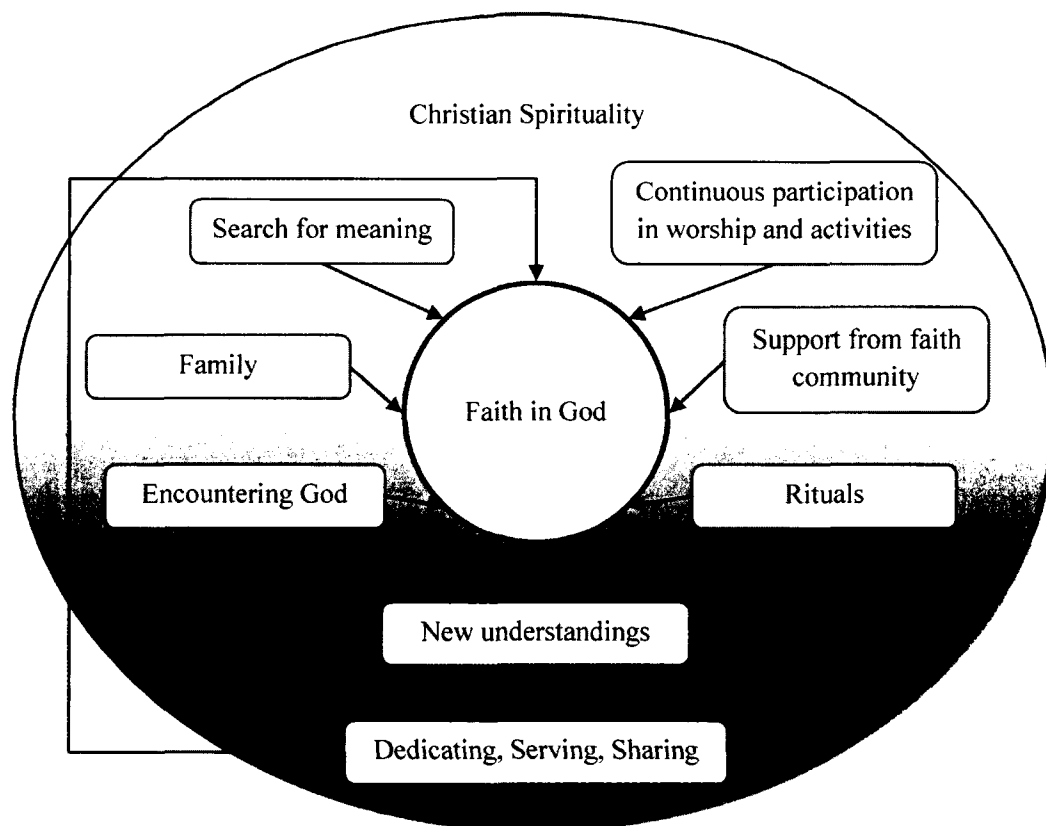


Figure 4. God-centered Spiritual Journey and Lives of Bereaved Parents

Variable factors are interrelated with other factors to support one's faith in God.



After encountering God, bereaved parents confirmed their faith in God and decided to live their lives in a sincere relationship with God. Through rituals, bereaved parents experienced a transcendental moment of encountering God as they searched for meaning of the death and of their own lives. Continuous attendance at worship services supported their faith in God. From community support, they realized God's love. However, community or family support itself cannot function to transform one's life, but its role is to strengthen one's faith in God. As seen from the narratives, the author of their lives has changed from themselves to God. The change of self-narrative to God's narrative indicates that their faith became founded in God.

Thus, faith in God becomes the fixed factor within their spiritual journey as the parents learn the meaning of the death and their own lives. It is the fundamental factor functioning as the principle of their experiences. In different ways, every bereaved parent experienced a specific moment of healing and transformation. Then, bereaved parents began to realize God's unchangeable characteristics: God of love, God of grace, God of the universe, God the creator, God who prepares them, God who responds to them, God of being with them. This provided them with new perspectives on the purpose and value of their lives. That led them to carry out God's mission. They dedicated their lives to various missions by serving others, helping other bereaved parents as wounded healers, and sharing their stories about how God worked for them in getting through their grief. This dedication also helped them reconfirm and maintain their faith in God. However, it is important to note that these spiritual journeys and lives of bereaved parents were experienced within the larger context of Christian spirituality.

### Suggestions for Pastoral Care Ministry

This dissertation is a practical theological work. As Poling and Miller indicate, practical theology begins with “deep awareness of the richness of concrete experience,” and it requires bringing back the experience and situation with well-developed practical direction and thought.<sup>236</sup> The work of practical theology is grounded on faithful practice of the church participating in God’s redemptive mission and direct transformative practice in relation to the church and world through valid interpretation of the situation. Thus, the purpose of the interpretation of bereaved parents’ experiences from diverse perspectives was to enhance understanding of the complicated human experience of the loss of a child and provide pastors and church leaders with a revised and deepened form of practice.

Poling and Miller emphasize the importance of living Christian community. The church functions as the theological locus for evaluating the church’s practice and for guiding church members to participate in God’s redemptive and transformative works. Poling and Miller suggest two key questions that the Christian community needs to ask for ongoing practices: “What is God doing among us?” and “What is God calling us to become?”<sup>237</sup> In addition to these two questions, the church needs to ask one more question, “How do we adequately accomplish God’s calling?” This question implies that we must find ways for Christian community to provide bereaved parents with appropriate support and care.

Considering six variable factors, three of the factors—searching for meaning of the death and their own lives, encountering God, and family—are related to the private

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<sup>236</sup> Poling and Miller, 66.

<sup>237</sup> Poling and Miller, 12.

domain. What bereaved parents do to give meaning to their lives is entirely dependent on their decisions and their relationship with God. No one can help this aspect of their decision-making. Only God can give meaning to their lives. As such, encountering God is also a personal experience—whether they encounter God in a spiritual moment through reading Bible or praying to God or meditating on it. On the other hand, the other three factors have more to do with the public domain. These include support from their faith community, continuous participation in worship and activities, and rituals. In this public realm, pastors and members of Christian community can assist bereaved parents get through their grief and realize God-centered healing and transformation. I suggest four perspectives and ways for the Christian community to help bereaved parents.

First, bereaved parents search for the meaning of the loss of a child in their personal relationships with God. Mitchell and Anderson consider the faith community, including friends, relatives, pastors, and counselors to be a primary resource to assist the bereaved. However, Mitchell and Anderson warn helpers not to provide the bereaved with premature comfort by making such promises as “things will be better” and “God will take the pain away.”<sup>238</sup> In addition, it is also premature comfort to answer ‘why’ questions about God or mysteries of life. In early times of grief, ‘why’ questions are often asked by bereaved parents as “expressions of anger and confusion.”<sup>239</sup> Premature religious comfort only hinders the grief process. Meaning of the loss of the child and their lives is determined by bereaved parents, not by others.

Pastors and members should not try to give answers to ultimate questions in an attempt to comfort bereaved parents during the early stage of the loss. It would be better

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<sup>238</sup> Mitchell and Anderson, 122.

<sup>239</sup> Mitchell and Anderson, 122-23.

not to say anything, but instead to offer the simple comfort of being with them. As seen in sub-theme *Inappropriate Words*, some words to attempt to console bereaved parents were inappropriate and hurt rather than helped them in their situation of deep pain and grief. These words include: think about something you need to repent; God only allows pain that they are able to handle; the pain is a blessing from God; the pain is a test to help them grow in faith ---and words like that.

As Eunhee said, even when no one said such words, bereaved parents could not help looking back over their lives to see if there was something wrong they had done in their thoughts and behaviors for which God was punishing them. In other words, they had to search for meaning of the loss and their lives by themselves. Others' attempts to make sense of the loss are unhelpful and unnecessary. Kang-Soo acknowledged that the reason people spoke inappropriate words was because they tried to comfort with words from their faith, but they did not know what to say. As Jane said, "There are words and times to speak and not speak." In early time of the loss, bereaved parents need someone being with them, not talking to them.

In the early hours after the accident of the Korean ferry Sewol that caused the deaths of 294 people, including 250 students, some pastors spoke about the accident and death inappropriately. Pastor L mentioned that people needed to repent before God in this human tragic accident. Pastor J said, "Why did financially poor family send students to Jeju Island for field trip that caused this tragic accident?" Pastor K spoke, "God did not make the ferry to sink, but God sacrificed these young students to give Korea an opportunity to repent before God." Accidents are not caused by God because people need to repent. These pastors were inappropriate when they spoke, taking advantage of the

accident to promote their ideas of an angry God.

Following the April 2014 accident, about 500 bereaved parents demonstrated against the government, demanding to know why those in charge did not try to save students' lives. As long as the truth was not brought to light, bereaved parents were unable to step into the process of meaning-making. How do they think about the meaning of the death of their child in this situation? Believing the government had hidden the truth behind their deaths, bereaved parents' grief became complicated and lasted longer. In that situation, people needed to stop analyzing the accident. Rather, they needed to be with the bereaved parents who were crying out to the government. That would have been a real comfort for them.

Thus, the second suggestion is being there with the bereaved. Being there with sufferers is important in comforting them. Bereaved parents mentioned how their faith community supported them providing food and care when they were in the hospital and home after the loss of their child as seen in the theme *Faith Community as Resources of Support*. Bereaved parents felt safe and secure when church members visited them where their child was hospitalized. Pastors and members provided them with prayers and Bible verses that comforted them. Kang-Soo indicated that being a Christian itself was helpful because he knew the Christian community would be with him in the crisis situation. Jisook felt God's love when she received support from her church. Doo-Hwan was moved by pastors' visit and prayer when the floor was stained with blood and the smell of the blood still in the living room.

Being there means not only being there to provide prayers, Bible verses, and food and care, but also being there to offer the presence of a caring person. As Sharon

indicated, she did not remember people who spoke about Christian beliefs to comfort her, but she remembered people who were with her and who cried with her without saying anything. As Jane mentioned, affectional or relational touch is crucial and helpful in early times of the loss to console bereaved parents. In pastoral care ministry, being there with people who are in pain and grief might be the most valuable work for pastors as Jesus was with people who suffered from poverty, disease, and isolation. Jesus' presence and advocacy for the marginalized evoked healing and transformation.

Authentic participation in the locus of human suffering can generate healing and transformation. Recently, the paradigm of pastoral theology has shifted to focus more on participation in social issues. John Patton identifies three major paradigms within the field of pastoral theology: The *classical* paradigm focuses on "the message of pastoral care," which extended from the beginning of Christianity to the appearance of care and counseling that was influenced by the dynamics of psychology.<sup>240</sup> The *clinical* paradigm emphasized psychology and psychotherapy. The *communal contextual* paradigm for pastoral care is associated with ecumenicity, initiated by the liberation movements, and developed by feminist theology and black theology concerning gender and race issues.<sup>241</sup>

In the 1970s and 1980s, many pastoral theologians criticized pastoral care and counseling for placing too much emphasis on "individuals' self-expression and self-realization." This focus was the result of the impact of psychology that was not concerned with a theological and moral orientation.<sup>242</sup> In addition, Emmanuel Lartey insists that the

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<sup>240</sup> John Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 4.

<sup>241</sup> Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "The Human Web: Reflections on the State of Pastoral Theology," *Christian Century* 7 (April 1993): 366.

<sup>242</sup> Barbara J. McClure, *Moving Beyond Individualism*, 108; Miller-McLemore, "Also a Pastoral Theologian," 821; Indicating a paradigm shift in the 1970s and 1980s,

clerical paradigm of pastoral care limits pastoral care to individual agency without exploring its communal nature.<sup>243</sup> Recently, pastoral theologians have recognized psychology's narrow focus on the individual, and they are aware that the church's ministry of care needs to be connected not only to inner transformation but also to outer social reformation.<sup>244</sup> In particular, Elaine Graham points to a lack of interest in social issues within pastoral care and counseling.<sup>245</sup> These acknowledgments by pastoral theologians mark a shift in the focus of pastoral care to a wider concern with cultural and social contexts.<sup>246</sup>

In Korea, the families of victims asked the Korean government to explain the reason why government did not try to save passengers when they had enough time to rescue them. Bereaved parents and individuals demonstrated against the government since they believed that government hid something related to the accident. Many people and NGOs participated in the demonstration. Particularly, mothers united in the demonstration against the government, and it extended to Korean mothers who live in the USA, demanding an inquiry into the true state of the accident. Some Protestant pastors and Catholic priests joined in the demonstration. Even some pastors participated in 40 days of fasting with bereaved parents in the KwangHwa-Moon square in Seoul where the demonstrations were held.

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McClure writes that "family systems theory" enables pastoral theology to see social realities of communities in larger social systems. See: Barbara Jo McClure, "Pastoral Theology as the Art of Paying Attention: Widening the Horizons," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 12, no. 2 (2008): 197.

<sup>243</sup> Emmanuel Y. Larrey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2006), 26-27.

<sup>244</sup> McClure, *Moving Beyond Individualism*, 108.

<sup>245</sup> Elaine Graham, "Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty," *HTS Theologise Studies/Theological Studies* 62, no. 3 (2006): 857.

<sup>246</sup> Miller-McLemore, "Human Web", 367.

While some pastors actively participated in this movement, many other pastors and churches kept silence about this issue. Some even said, “Stop the demonstration” and “That’s enough.” As a bereaved parent, Brian mentioned that bereaved parents need someone who is being with them, crying with them, and advocating for them. Particularly, if the death is related to a social issue, it is difficult for bereaved parents to fight against the huge government system. Christians and ministers need to look after people who are crying out for justice, and need to participate in their pain and grief.

Third, it is an important note that pastors and leaders of churches need to have continuous concerns and be motivated to engage in church activities. In the early period after the loss, bereaved parents are diffident about going outside and attending church. As Jane experienced it, she mentioned that it is essential for community members to keep trying to extend a helping hand to bereaved parents although they seem to reject the help; eventually they will be ready to accept it. At the time, Jane found it hard to receive support because she was in a depressive mood. Particularly, she rejected prayer from church because she felt a sense of resentment and betrayal toward God when her children died. However, she was motivated to recover her faith in God when she kept going to church and talked with trustworthy persons in her church.

Bereaved parents stressed that it was helpful to complain to God because that served as a string that tied them with God. Thus, they insisted on attending worship service. However, it was not that easy for Eunhee to go to church, particularly on the first Sunday after the loss of her son. She felt people talked about her and blamed her for being there right after the loss. She felt people were likely to talk about her, asking how she could eat food after the passing away of her child. However, she kept going to church



to maintain her faith in God, and her husband supported her by being with her. Bereaved parents need a person who encourages them to attend church and participate in church activities. The person can be their spouse who stands firm in faith in God or a member who has a close relationship with them or pastors and leaders.

For Jisook, there was the woman who led her to the church and guided her to adjust to American life. The woman kept helping her when Jisook took care of her son in the hospital by being with her and praying for her. After the loss of her son, the woman encouraged her to join leadership programs and provided her with the opportunity to work for the elderly. This ongoing concern and close relationship helped Jisook overcome her pain and grief. For Doo-Hwan, his pastor encouraged him to join in leadership program, entrusted him with being a leader of small group meeting, and inspired him to speak testimony in a spiritual training program. Four bereaved parents engaged in a spiritual retreat program as guest speakers. They have spoken their stories about how God helped them get through their pain of the loss. Likewise, bereaved parents need to be assisted by someone to participate in activities that can help them grow their faith in God particularly in early times of the loss.

On the other hand, the role of the pastor is crucial for bereaved parents in adjusting to new circumstances and getting over the grief. In the process of recruiting interview participants, I strongly felt that pastors who hesitated to introduce me to members of bereaved parents were even unable to talk to them about the loss. They thought that bereaved parents would be hurt if they mentioned the loss-related issues. However, pastors who were willing to refer me to bereaved parents have maintained close relationships with members of bereaved parents. They have known how the

bereaved members have gone through their grief process in relation to faith in God. They guided bereaved parents' steps in the path of overcoming their grief by encouraging them to participate in church activities and programs. For them, talking with bereaved parents about the dead child was not difficult, but rather they could naturally talk with the parents about the child.

Consequently, if the relationship between the pastor and bereaved parents is not open, they cannot have an open relationship with other members, which results in their being isolated and having a problem with their relationship with God. Possibly, they will shun people and social engagements. In the early period of the loss of his daughter, Doo-Hwan joined a bereaved parents group. Their meeting held once a month. Doo-Hwan said that the only thing they did when they met was drink beer and wine to deaden their pain. However, when Doo-Hwan was changed, he talked to them about how he encountered God and introduced a spiritual retreat program. So, the group members attended these meetings. Then they changed their attitudes toward their lives and faith in God. Doo-Hwan said that now they pray to God and talk about positive aspects of life when they meet.

For bereaved parents, it is necessary to have a motivation to participate in church activities. They may possibly seek for a justification to come out from being alone at home. It is true that not all bereaved parents actively search for meaning of their lives reading the Bible and praying to God. Not all bereaved parents experience a spiritual moment in which they encounter God or hear God's voice. They need another opportunity and a person to engage their lives in valuable activities. They might be longing for a person to lead them to the right path of getting through their grief. All my

interviewees kept their faith in God by attending church continuously and participating in church activities. Through these experiences, now they give testimony, share their life stories with others, encourage people who are in hardship, and help other bereaved parents.

Fourth, I suggest that pastors design creative rituals. As seen from the function of rituals, rituals have the power of transformation, comfort, healing, and remembrance, particularly in a situation when people must change and take steps forward. Rituals play an important role as worthy vehicles that allow bereaved parents to recognize the reality of the death of the child, provide a pathway through their grief, and sustain a spiritual bond with the dead child. In particular, through funerals, bereaved parents, friends, and members of faith community can be integrated by reaffirming the death, expressing emotions, valuing the life of the child, and regaining hope and comfort.

Bereaved parents in my study experienced public rituals such as worship, funeral, and memorial service that pastors conducted. However, it seemed odd to me that not many bereaved parents said they were comforted and healed by these rituals. Only two bereaved parents mentioned that the funeral was meaningful. Jisook was consoled especially by the beautiful place where the funeral was conducted. Eunhee was moved by the poem that her pastor wrote and her announcer friend recited, and she felt treated like a VIP. They also appreciated large group of people who attended the funeral. Jane was touched by the EM pastor's invitation to design the funeral together. Seen from these cases, bereaved parents need personalized rituals that they feel are meaningful to them and their dead child.

In designing a funeral and memorial service, pastors can suggest thoughtful ideas

and information to create specialized and personalized rituals, listening carefully to bereaved parents' needs. Pastors are familiar with conducting funerals, but mostly for the death of old persons. Losing a child is a unique experience and causes bereaved parents complicated grief responses. Pastors need to understand the particularity of the parental grief and perform rituals in a creative way so that bereaved parents can be comforted and healed by the personalized creative rituals. The familiarity hinders pastors from perceiving the particularity of the death of a child and performing creative rituals.

Recently people's thoughts and minds about traditional culture has been changed from just following rules and regulations to reinterpreting values in pragmatic lines of thought, just as feminist liturgy denies patriarchal thoughts and actions by restoring women's liturgical memory and reconstructing a new liturgical tradition. In other words, traditionally formalized rituals cannot touch people's hearts. Christian communities have lost the experience of *liminality* and *communitas* in rituals, and the power of healing and transformation of ritual has become powerless as they are reduced to pre-formed rituals and use an artificial mode of rituals. That was the reason Jane mentioned a conventional ritual negatively.

Rituals are a sacred and transformative process. If that aspect is disregarded, there remains only a powerless event. Then churches become enervated, losing a specific function of the church: uniting community, experiencing sacred moments, and deepening and changing lives. Driver mentions that ritual is deeply related to human destination: losing the sacred element of ritual is not only losing a way, but also losing value and a reason for being. Thus, I assert that pastors need continuing education to be equipped to understand the experience of bereaved parents and to construct creative rituals. That will

result in their care ministries flourishing.

In sum, I suggest four crucial considerations in pastoral care ministry. First, pastors should be careful not to give inappropriate words to bereaved parents in early stages of the loss. Second, I emphasize the importance of being there with bereaved parents. Third, pastors need continuous concerns about the bereaved parents to lead them to involvement in church activities that may strengthen their faith in God. Fourth, I suggest that pastors construct creative rituals that bring about healing and transformation. Through consideration of my suggestions, I believe that pastors can guide and comfort bereaved parents leading them to God-centered healing and transformation in their grieving process.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

This study explored lived experiences of Korean bereaved parents to explicate what is important in their experience. As it was practical theological work, I followed Osmer's four tasks of practical theology as my theological framework. I adopted a qualitative method for this study to examine the role of Christian spirituality in coping with the loss of a child. In particular, I designed my research project following the methodology of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. From the data collection and analysis process, I presented seven super-ordinate themes. As an interpretive task, these findings were put into dialogue with the social sciences and theology. As a result, I became assured that Christian spirituality played a primary role in the spiritual journeys and lives of bereaved parents as they processed their grief. Particularly, faith in God functioned as a grounding factor in God-centered healing and transformation. Finally, I presented four suggestions of pastoral care ministry for bereaved parents.

#### Summary of Chapters

In Chapter 1, I discussed the necessity and the purpose of this study. Methodology and theology were used as a framework for this study. I identified this study as an interdisciplinary work to interpret bereaved parents' experience from diverse perspectives. It was necessary to define key terms including spirituality, bereavement, grief, grieving mourning. In addition, various grief responses were explained. I clarified the scope and limitation of my study. I limited participants to Korean bereaved parents five to fifteen years after the loss of their child, but did not limit the cause of death. Target audience and originality and contribution of this study were also discussed, and I outlined chapters.

In Chapter 2, I reviewed current literature that deals with parental grief from both theological and psychological perspectives. Before I engaged in the literature review, I examined grief theories from early psychoanalytic perspectives to contemporary developed models including stage theory, attachment theory, task theory, dual process model, continuing bond theory, and meaning-making theory. Many pastoral theologians relied on these theories to explain bereaved parents' experiences and present coping strategies. In both areas of theology and psychology, scholars emphasized the role of spirituality in coping with grief. However, only a few studies of bereaved parents were found in the field of pastoral theology.

In Chapter 3, I explained the reason this practical theological study needed a qualitative research method. Among diverse qualitative methods, I selected phenomenology, particularly the IPA approach. The philosophical views of phenomenology were described, and the research was designed in accordance with principles of IPA. The detailed process of data collection was presented: the participant recruits, the process of in-depth interview, the data transcription, research journal, and reflection notes. I presented the IPA data analysis process, and data analysis was conducted in three main steps: initial analysis, within-case analysis, and across-cases analysis. In addition, confidentiality and validity of this study were explained.

In Chapter 4, I introduced the background of participants and situation of the deaths of their children. Seven super-ordinate themes were presented, namely, *Community as a Source of Support*, *A Moment of Encountering God*, *God Gives their Life Meaning*, *Significant Perspective Changes on Life and Death*, *Sharing their Stories of Life*, *Family as the Ground of Sustaining Life*, and *Remembering the Child*. Under each

of the themes, sub-themes were used to explain the details of the super-ordinate themes.

In Chapter 5, I attempted to discuss findings in dialogues between social theories and theological perspectives. This chapter has two main sections. First was the dialogue between meaning-making theory and narrative perspectives. I explained the reason I selected meaning-making theory among other grief models, and I presented theoretical background of meaning-making theory and narrative therapy. In particular, I described the process of making sense of the loss of a child as two processes of sense making and benefit making. In addition, the process of re-authoring stories was presented from perspectives of narrative therapy and narrative theology. Second was the dialogue between ritual theories and feminist theological perspectives. I explained the relationship between ritual theory and spirituality. Then, spiritual healing and transformation were described from ritual and feminist liturgical perspectives. In Korean feminist perspectives, I explained how bereaved parents in my study perceived images of God and Jesus.

In Chapter 6, I attempted to integrate all interpretative works in pastoral care and counseling. I analyzed spiritual factors that affected bereaved parents in their coping process, and I extracted six variable factors and one prime factor. From this analysis, I found that the spiritual journeys and lives of bereaved parents were centered on faith in God as a fixed factor. This is God-centered healing and transformation. In conclusion, I presented four thoughtful suggestions that will enable pastors and members of Christian communities to take better care of bereaved parents.

#### Limitations and Contributions of the Study

There were some limitations of this study. I attempted to find particular elements of Christian spirituality that helped bereaved couples to cope jointly with their grief.



However, there were no specific activities for bereaved couples to get through their grief jointly. In addition, there were differences between fathers and mothers in coping with their grief. However, I could not explore the differences under scrutiny because the sample of this study was not large enough to generalize its findings. Moreover, it was hard to grasp cultural differences between American and Korean American or Korean American and Korean because they lived in a mixed culture. Interviewees have lived in the US for a range of 16 to 40 years.

In relation to lived experiences of bereaved parents, few qualitative research studies have been conducted in the area of practical theology in Korea. As I indicated a target audience of Korean American and Korean pastors and scholars, this dissertation can provide them with abundant insights in studying unique experiences of bereaved parents and looking after them. In particular, Korean pastors do not have adequate resources and information about bereaved parents. This study can prove an incentive to increase the study of bereaved parents in Korea. However, I recognize that I could not present all aspects of grief or of bereaved parents' experiences.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

I have three suggestions for further study of bereaved parents. First, a joint interview of pastors and bereaved parents will provide researchers with additional perspectives in seeing experiences of bereaved parents through diverse lenses. When I visited the church of a bereaved parent, I met her pastor by chance and had a conversation with him. The pastor knew the bereaved parent well because the pastor had ministered in the church for 15 years. The pastor assisted her from the time the bereaved parent's son was hospitalized. He visited the hospital and conducted funeral and

memorial services for her family. The pastor guided the growth of her faith in God. He has seen how she has gotten through her grief. Another bereaved parent told me that he could not have overcome his grief without his pastor's help. Thus, a joint interview of the pastor of bereaved parents could offer pastors more concrete knowledge and information for pastoral care ministry.

Second, the study of surviving siblings can be a research focus. In my participant recruiting process, a bereaved mother was willing to participate in my interview, but her husband rejected participation in the interview. She asked me if she could bring her daughter instead of her husband. She said that her daughter could speak about her experience as a sibling of the dead son if I needed two participants. I appreciated her suggestion. However, I explained to her that it did not meet the purpose and criteria of my research. When I think of her suggestion, the study of bereaved siblings can be a valuable subject of study. How did the experience of surviving siblings influence their lives? How did Christian spirituality help them to cope with their grief?

Third, it is necessary to investigate how non-Christian bereaved parents get through their grief. In the process of the participant recruit, I recognized that there were bereaved parents who continue to struggle with their pain and grief among the Christian bereaved parents even though the time has been more than 10 years since the loss of a child. Their pastors had difficulties talking with them even to ask them how they were doing. Pastors of the bereaved parents were unable to refer them to me. I really wanted to listen to their stories so that I could examine why Christian spirituality did not influence their grieving process in a positive way. Then, I thought of how non-Christian bereaved parents experience the grief process. Once they would allow the interview, it could give

more insights into the study of bereaved parents.

## Appendix A

## Letter to the Pastor of the Church

안녕하세요?

저는 클레어몬트신학대학원에서 목회상담학 Ph.D 과정에 재학중인 윤득형 목사라고 합니다. 이렇게 편지를 드리는 것은, 현재 제가 쓰고 있는 논문의 한 파트로서 리서치를 하려고 하는데 도움을 요청하기 위함입니다. 제 논문의 주제는 아이를 잃은 부모들의 슬픔을 치유하는 데 있어서 기독교의 영성이 어떤 영향을 미치는 지에 연구입니다. 이 연구를 통해서 슬픔을 당한 부모들을 돌보고 상담하는 데에 있어 목회자들에게 실제적인 가이드와 리소스를 제공하자고 하는 것이 제 논문의 궁극적인 목표입니다.

이를 위해서 아이를 잃은 부모님이 목사님의 교회에 있다면, 제 인터뷰에 참여할 수 있도록 권면해 주시기를 부탁 드립니다. 대상은 아이를 잃은 지 적어도 5년 이상 된 부모여야 하며, 사고, 질병, 자살 등으로 아이가 죽었을 당시 나이가 1-20 세 사이여야 합니다. 이러한 기준에 맞는 교인이 목사님의 교회에 계시다면, 그 분이 인터뷰에 참여할 수 있을 만한 상황인지를 고려하여 제 연락처를 알려주시거나, 그 분의 연락처를 제게 알려주시면 감사하겠습니다.

리서치는 인터뷰로 진행이 되며, 클레어몬트신학대학원의 교수님의 지도와 인터뷰 대상자의 모든 비밀과 안전을 보장하는 학교의 원칙 아래 이루어지게 됩니다. 인터뷰는 본인이 원하는 바에 따라, 집이나 교회, 혹은 학교에서 행하게 될 것입니다. 이 모든 리서치 과정은 어떠한 해가 되지 않을 것이며, 투명하고 안전하게 이루어질 것입니다. 그럼, 목사님의 연락을 기다리겠습니다. 감사합니다.

Hi! This is Deuk Hyoung Yoon, who is a Ph.D student at Claremont School of Theology. I am writing to ask your help in doing my research as a part of my dissertation. The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experience of bereaved parents and the role of Christian spirituality in coping with the loss of a child. The result of the study will provide practical guidance and resource for pastors and church leaders to take care of bereaved parents.

For this study, I would like you to recommend the parent to participate in my research if you have a member who lost her/his child. The subject of the interview must be a parent who lost a child at ages between 1 and 20 and for whom at least five years have passed since the loss of her/his child regardless of cause of death such as accident, illness, suicide, or homicide.

The interview will be taken under my advisor's supervision and the IRB (Institutional Review Board) of Claremont School of Theology. I will treat the participant with respect and dignity and his or her identity as confidential. The place of the interview will be decided upon the participant's preference. It will be the participant's home or church. If both places are uncomfortable to the participant, I will invite him or her to a reserved room on my school campus. There will be no harm in participating in the study, and I will make every effort to maintain security and confidentiality for the participant. I am looking forward to hearing from you. Thank you!

Rev. Deuk Hyoung Yoon

## Appendix B

### Consent Document for Interviews

#### 인터뷰를 위한 동의서

##### Title of Study 연구제목

Pastoral Care and Counseling for Bereaved Parents: A Phenomenological Study of Role of Christian Spirituality in Coping with Loss of a Child

자녀를 잃은 부모를 위한 목회상담: 아이를 잃은 슬픔을 극복하는데 있어서 기독교 영성의 역할에 관한 현상학적 연구

##### Principle Investigator 주된 연구자

Deuk Hyoung Yoon

Contact: deukhyoung.yoon@cst.edu, 773-574-2993

1325 N. College Ave. Claremont, CA 91711

##### Institution 기관

Department of Practical Theology, Spiritual Care and Counseling

Claremont School of Theology

1325 N. College Ave. Claremont, CA 91711

Dean: Dr. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook

Chairperson of Institutional Review Board: Dr. Tom Phillips

##### Introduction 서언

This consent document outlines your rights as a participant in this study. Please read this consent form carefully and ask questions before you decide whether or not you want to participate in this research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research. If you have further questions and concerns about this research, you can reach me at my email or cell phone. You may also contact my academic advisor, Dr. Samuel Lee, Professor of Practical Theology, Spiritual Care and Counseling at Claremont School of Theology at 909-447-6331. This research project has been reviewed and received clearance from IRB of Claremont School of Theology. If you have questions or concerns regarding your involvement in the study, you may contact IRB chairperson at 909-447-2512 or irb@cst.edu.

이 동의서는 이 연구참여에 있어서 권리를 말해주고 있습니다. 주의 깊게 읽어보시고 이 연구에 참여하기로 동의하기 전에 질문이 있으시면 말씀해 주시기 바랍니다. 연구 참여 전이나 진행 중, 혹은 그 이후에라도 언제든지 질문하셔도 됩니다. 만일에 이 연구에 관해서 더 자세한 질문이나 관심거리가 있으시다면 제 이메일이나 전화번호로 연락해도 좋습니다. 저 지도교수이신 이경식 박사(전화 909-447-6331)에게 연락하셔도 좋습니다. 이 연구 프로젝트는 클레어몬트 신학대학원의 윤리위원회의 검토를 거쳐서 통과되었습니다. 윤리위원회에 질문하고 싶은 사항이 있으시면, 위원장인 탐 필립스 박사님께 연락하셔도 됩니다. (전화 909-447-2512 혹은 이메일 irb@cst.edu)

### Purpose of the Study 연구의 목적

This research is conducted as part of my dissertation research. You are being asked to participate in a research study designed to better understand the lived experience of bereaved Korean parents and the role of Christian spirituality in coping with the loss of a child. The result of this study will help pastors and church leaders to enhance the understanding of the parental grief experience. The results of the study may be published in appropriate academic books and journals, but any personal information that you provide will be fully anonymized.

이 연구는 제 논문의 한 부분으로 진행됩니다. 이 연구는 자녀를 잃은 부모의 살아있는 경험들을 이해하고, 슬픔을 극복하는 데에 있어서의 기독교의 영성의 영향을 연구하고자 하는 것으로서, 당신은 이 연구에 참여하도록 요청을 받고 있습니다. 이 연구의 결과는 목사들과 교회 지도자들이 부모의 슬픔과 아픔의 경험이 어떠한지에 대한 이해를 돕는 데에 중요한 역할을 하게 될 것입니다. 연구의 결과는 아카데미한 책이나 저널에 출판 혹은 게재 될 수 있습니다. 하지만, 개인적인 정보는 모두 익명으로 처리될 것입니다.

### Time Required 소요시간

There will be two different interviews on two different days. The first interview will be conducted over a period of 60-90 minutes for each participant. The second joint interview will take 30-90 minutes for each couple.

두 번의 인터뷰가 각각 다른 날 진행될 것입니다. 첫 번째 인터뷰는 개인 인터뷰로서 60-90 분 가량 진행될 것입니다. 두 번째 인터뷰는 30-90 분 동안 진행되는 데 이때는 부부가 함께 참여하게 될 것입니다.

### Procedures 과정

If you consent, you will be asked to have two separate interview sessions with me. All interviews are digitally audio-recorded to be transcribed and analyzed. Before the first interview, you will be asked to fill out the background information survey. Then, I will ask you to share your experience of how your Christian faith and practice affected your ability to cope with your grief. The second session of interview will be a joint interview with your spouse held two weeks after the first session. For this second interview, I will bring my reflection on your responses to the first interview, and I will share my reflection with you so that you can check if there is wrong information or misunderstanding and add your reflection to it. Then, I will ask questions for you and your spouse about what particular aspects of Christian spirituality have helped you in coping jointly with your grief. I plan to have 4-6 bereaved couples for this study.

동의하신다면, 당신은 두 개의 각각 다른 인터뷰를 저와 함께 하게 됩니다. 모든 인터뷰는 전자 오디오 장치를 이용하여 녹음되게 되며, 후에 제가 인터뷰 내용을 그대로 받아 적고 분석하는 데에 사용하게 됩니다. 첫 번째 인터뷰 시작 전에 먼저 기본 정보를 위한 설문작성을 해 주실 것을 요청 받을 것입니다. 그리고 나서 당신의 경험을 나누도록 요청 받을 것입니다. 주로, 질문들은 기독교 신앙과 실천이 슬픔을

극복하는 데에 있어 어떤 역할을 했는지에 관한 것입니다. 두 번째 인터뷰는 첫 번째 인터뷰가 있고 난 후 한달 되기 전 쯤에 있을 것입니다. 이때는 부부가 함께 참여하게 될 것입니다. 먼저는 제가 첫 번째 인터뷰한 내용을 토대로 제 느낌과 소감을 이야기할 것이고, 이에 대해서 혹시 제가 잘못 이해한 것이 있는지 확인하며, 당신의 의견을 듣게 될 것입니다. 그리고 나서, 두 분께 질문을 할 것입니다. 질문의 내용은 어떤 특정한 기독교 영성의 요소가 두 분이 함께 슬픔을 극복하는 데에 도움이 되었는지에 관한 것입니다.

#### Alternative Procedures 대안적 과정

For the place of interview, you can choose the place to meet: it can be at your home or your church where you feel comfortable and secure. If neither place is available, I will arrange to meet you at a reserved room on the CST campus. For the first and second session of the interviews, you must meet me in person. However, if you feel uncomfortable with your responses to the first interview being shared with your spouse, you may choose to have a third interview for sharing reflection or we can discuss the possibility of an alternative conversation such as talking over the phone or email communication. The email text will be deleted right after I copy and store it in a Word document of my password-protected personal computer. The alternative communication is only for the sharing of reflections, and you still need to participate in a second joint interview with your spouse.

인터뷰의 장소에 관해서는, 당신이 장소를 정하실 수 있습니다. 집이나 교회 어디든지 편안하고 안전하다고 생각하는 곳으로 정하시면 됩니다. 만약에 두 개의 장소가 다 어려우시다면, 제가 저희 학교에 방을 하나 준비하여서 그 곳에서 인터뷰를 하겠습니다. 첫 번째와 두 번째 모두 반드시 저와 만나서 인터뷰를 해야 합니다. 하지만, 만일 첫 번째 인터뷰한 내용을 아내 혹은 남편과 나누는 것을 원치 않으신다면, 대안적인 방법을 함께 의논해 볼 수 있습니다. 가령 전화나 이메일로도 할 수 있고, 세 번째 인터뷰를 잡을 수도 있습니다. 이메일로 교환된 내용은 비밀번호로 보호된 저의 개인 컴퓨터 워드문서에 복사해 두고 나서는 바로 삭제하도록 하겠습니다. 이러한 대안적인 방법은 오직 의견과 소감을 나누는 것을 위한 것이며, 부부가 함께하는 인터뷰에는 반드시 참여하셔야 합니다.

#### Voluntary Participation 자발적인 참여

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. Even when you consent to participate in the study, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty, and you may decline to answer any questions. Your participation in the study will not result in any financial compensation, and you will not incur any costs.

이 연구에 참여하는 것은 순전히 자발적인/자원봉사적인 참여입니다. 비록 연구참여에 동의를 하셨더라도 당신은 아무런 패널티 없이 어떤 시점에서든지 참여를 중단할 권리가 있습니다. 또한 어떤 질문에 대해서 답을 안 하셔도 좋습니다. 이 연구에 참여하시는 것에 대한 어떤 보상은 없습니다. 또한 비용이 들지 않을 것입니다.

### Potential Risks 잠재적인 위험요소들

The potential risks of participating in this study are no higher than minimal. However, telling the story about coping with the loss of your child may trigger your painful feelings in the course of our conversation. If it becomes severe, I will stop the interview and give you time to decide whether you want to continue the interview, and I will provide you with appropriate pastoral counseling session or contact information for affordable counseling referral if needed. In regard to confidentiality, you will be identified with pseudonyms. Recorded material will be kept in a secure place and destroyed when the study is completed. The method of maintaining confidentiality is described in the following paragraph.

이 연구참여에 있어 잠재적인 위험요소는 거의 없습니다. 단지 우려하는 것은 당신이 아이를 잃은 경험을 이야기할 때 혹시 슬픈 감정을 유발하게 될 수도 있습니다. 만일 좀 심각하다 싶으면, 인터뷰를 멈추고 계속 진행할 수 있을지 결정할 수 있도록 시간을 드리도록 하겠습니다. 또한 심하신 경우, 제가 상담을 해 드리거나, 필요하시다면 적합한 상담사를 찾을 수 있도록 정보를 제공해 드리도록 하겠습니다. 비밀유지를 위해서 실명을 사용하지 않겠습니다. 기록된 모든 정보들은 안전한 장소에 보관될 것이고, 논문이 마쳐지게 되면 폐기하도록 하겠습니다. 비밀유지를 위한 자세한 방법은 다음 단락에서 자세히 설명하겠습니다.

### Confidentiality 비밀유지

I will treat your identity as confidential. To protect confidentiality, you and your deceased child will be identified by pseudonyms in all research documents. Identifying information about location and circumstances will be changed as needed to maintain confidentiality. I will hold all your information, including your name, interview, recording, and transcription, in a safe folder of my personal computer with password protection until the completion of my dissertation. I will keep transcripts and coded data for two years in a secured location after the completion of dissertation. The results of the study may be published in my dissertation and in possible future journal articles. However, your name and all personally identifiable information will be carefully excluded. If you are interested in the research findings, you will be given the opportunity to leave your contact information so that I can send you a copy of the results of my study.

저는 귀하의 정보를 비밀스럽게 잘 다루겠습니다. 저의 모든 서류에 비밀보장을 위해서 당신과 당신 아이의 이름은 익명으로 처리될 것입니다. 장소나 주변환경 등이 노출되지 않도록 지명이나 환경에 관련된 이름들은 다르게 쓰여질 것입니다. 저의 논문이 마쳐지기 전까지, 모든 정보들 (이름, 인터뷰, 리코딩, 필사본 등)은 오직 저의 비밀번호로 보호된 개인 컴퓨터에만 보관할 것입니다. 필사본과 분석한 데이터의 보관은 2년 더 하려고 합니다. 이 연구결과는 제 논문으로 출판되거나 발표될 수 있고, 소논문을 쓸 때도 이용될 수 있습니다. 하지만, 신분이 노출될만한 정보는 철저히 지키도록 하겠습니다. 혹시 연구결과가 궁금하시다면, 연락처를 남겨주시기 바랍니다. 제가 연구결과를 보내드리도록 하겠습니다.



### Potential Benefits 잠재적인 이익

In sharing a personal story about how Christian spirituality has helped participants in coping with the loss of a child, you may gain new understanding and insights about your experiences. In addition, you will contribute to greater knowledge about the role of Christian spirituality in the grieving process that may help others going through similar situations. Your participation in this research will also contribute to developing resources for pastoral care and counseling.

기독교의 영성이 어떻게 슬픔의 과정을 극복하는 데에 도움이 되는지에 관해서 개인적인 이야기를 나눔으로서 당신은 자신의 경험에 대한 새로운 이해와 통찰을 얻을 수 있을 것입니다. 게다가, 당신은 기독교 영성의 역할이 슬픔의 과정에 어떤 역할을 하는지에 대한 보다 큰 지식을 얻는 일에 공헌함으로써 같은 슬픔을 경험하고 있는 다른 사람들을 도울 수 있습니다. 당신의 참여는 또한 목회상담의 자료를 발전시키는 데에 큰 공헌을 하는 것입니다.

If you are satisfied with your understanding of the information in this document and agree to participate in this research project, please sign and date both copies of the form, and take one copy for your records.

만일 귀하께서 이 동의서가 마음에 드시고, 이 연구에 참여하시기로 동의하신다면, 두 장에 싸인과 날짜를 기록하시고 한 장은 보관해 두시기 바랍니다.

---

Participant Name (Printed)

---

Signature

---

Date

---

Researcher Name (Printed)

---

Signature

---

Date

## Appendix C

## Background Information Survey

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_  
 이름 나이

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 주소

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
 전화 이메일#May I contact you via email? (Y/N)

Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_  
 결혼상태

Where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_  
 어디서 태어나셨습니까?

How many years have you lived in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_  
 미국에는 얼마나 오래 사셨습니까?

How long have you been a Christian? \_\_\_\_\_  
 기독교인이 되신지는 얼마나 되셨습니까?

What is your current Church affiliation? \_\_\_\_\_  
 현재 다니고 있는 교회가 있습니까?

How long have you been in your current church? \_\_\_\_\_  
 그 교회는 얼마나 오래 다니셨나요?

What is your deceased child's name? \_\_\_\_\_  
 앞서 간 아이의 이름은 무엇입니까?

How old was your child at the time of his/her death? \_\_\_\_\_  
 아이가 죽었을 당시에 몇 살 이었습니까?

When did your child die? \_\_\_\_\_  
 언제 아이가 죽게 되었나요?

How did your child die? (e.g., accident, illness, and suicide)  
 어떻게 죽게 되었나요? (가령, 사고, 질병, 사고 등)

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## Appendix D

### Semi-Structured Questions

#### Interview #1:

- a. I would like to know you and your child. Can you tell me about your child? Can you show me his/her pictures?
- b. Can you tell me about how your son/daughter died?
- c. What feelings were you having at this time?
- d. How have you been since your child died?
- e. After your child died, what other things changed for you or did you change?
- f. Have you been able to find any meaning in the loss of your child?
- g. What are your beliefs about death?
- h. Have Christian faith and practices been helpful in coping with your loss?
- i. How have your church pastor and members assisted you?
- j. How do you currently identify your relationship with God, Jesus, and your church?
- k. Have you performed any symbolic ritual to cherish your child's memory?
- l. What was most helpful to you in getting through the time when you were grieving your child? What was least helpful?
- m. Have you ever become involved in any activity to help other parents who have been faced with a similar situation?
- n. What advice do you have for them?
- o. If you come up anything important to say, please let me know.

#### Interview #2:

- a. Have you had any conflict with each other after the loss of your child? How have you handled it?
- b. When your spouse was grieving, how have you tried to comfort him or her?
- c. Have you ever done any special activity with your spouse that could help you in coping jointly with your grief?
- d. What particular elements of Christian spirituality have helped you in coping jointly with your grief? (e.g., prayer, Bible reading, attending church, symbolic rituals)

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